

From: Bob Holler [bobflies@mac.com]
Sent: Tuesday, December 03, 2002
Subject: Update



From: Bob Holler [bobflies@mac.com]

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Subject: Update

Well, I finally arrived. Got in last night on a C-130 and it couldn't have been any more timely with the snow we were getting in Uzbekistan. Have I mentioned that I'm a big wimp when it comes to cold? Anyway, spent the day doing the handover with the Lt. that I'm replacing. Met a whole lot of people that I'll have to deal with while I'm here then went out to one of the ranges and zeroed in our weapons. The place has really changed since I left in March. Most of the coalition forces have left and with things slowing down, the SOF presence has really been reduced. Timing being everything, the Kiwi's threw a party tonight with shrimp, steak beer and everything. Great time. Anyway, instead of plywood over a cut down 55-gallon drum for shitters we now have real port-a-potties. And instead of having to burn our shit we now have real pumper trucks that do the deed. Instead of homemade submersible heater showers out of a trash can we now have homemade showers with real water heaters. And we can take more than one shower per week. As a matter of fact I took two today. The base infrastructure has made great progress and water and electricity are now common around the camp. We even have heaters for our tents. And instead of MRE's we now have a chow hall. The food's not great but it's not out of plastic bag. Now the routine develops and it's time to settle in. The key is to keep yourself busy. I'm looking forward to this tour because unlike my last, I get to play a little this time. I'll get to fly a little and with luck maybe even pull down a mission [yeah right :)]. You all take care of yourselves and each other. Peace.

Bob

From: Bob Holler [bobflies@mac.com]

Sent: Friday, December 06, 2002

Subject: Yes, Another Update

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!!!!!!!!!!

It's getting cold here now. It gets down into the 20's at night and the low 60's during the day. Today was real nice though, mid to high 60's. After my morning workout I sat outside in the sun and smoked a cigar and drank espresso. Very nice. I've settled into somewhat of a routine. I get up around 0500Z (1000 local) (everything we do is on zulu time), brush my teeth and then go to the gym (we have an old building that's been converted into a gym). After my morning workout, I shave and shower and then cook me up some oatmeal and a cup of espresso. So far, most mornings, I enjoy a cigar with that espresso. After that it's time for the endless task of administrivia. Crank up the classified computer and take care of emails and any issues that have come up (operational or administrative). We have our mass aircrew brief at 1100Z (1600 local) and then chow after the brief. Chow is delivered to us since we're on alert 24/7. Chow is not real impressive here but it's not MRE's. After chow it's more work (administrative, tweaking your gear, cleaning your weapons, etc) and then the boys usually do their workout about an hour after they eat. Once they're done we sit around and bullshit, read and watch movies. Sometimes during the day we have classes (especially since I'm here) on stuff we know but need to stay honed on. Today we had a class on our two primary radios. Good stuff and a great refresher. Tomorrow I have the lads conducting a massive cleanup and organization of our tactical operations center (TOC)/dayroom. I think they're real excited about that. We put up our xmas tree. It's got all the stuff: star on top, lights (embedded fiber optics that change color and everything), tinsel, beads, ornaments and even little (fake) presents below the tree. We all put our names in a hat today and drew who we're going to give presents to. The rules are: it's a secret santa draw (no one knows who drew who), you can buy, make, steal, trade for the gift you giving and there's no dollar limit. Luckily, I talked quite extensively this morning with the guy I drew so I have a good idea what makes him tick. Things are really not bad at all and I'm enjoying the shit out of myself being with operators and warriors instead of staff geeks. Life is good. Until we leave Air Force Hill. The base is administratively controlled by the Army and since they've run out of "real mission related tasks" they have resorted to typical Army: lets now concentrate on the bullshit. You can't grow beards, you can't wear outer wear fleece as outer wear (go figure), you can't ride around on a quad without a helmet and god forbid you should walk around without a shirt. And, I'm a 46 year old man who's been doing this for 28 1/2 years and I can't have a FUCKING BEER! Okay, I'm done venting. Really though, I'm having fun and enjoy being with the boys (maybe it makes me feel young?). This Sunday we are going to an Afghani dinner. I'm looking forward to that. Last time I was here we could go off base and eat but that's all changed since the Army took over. Enough for now. In case I don't write again before the holidays, you all have a kick ass xmas and an even better new year. Take care of yourselves and each other. I love you all. Peace.

Bob

From: Bob Holler [bobflies@mac.com]

Sent: Tuesday, December 10, 2002

Subject: Dust

I forgot about the dust. Dust. Like master card (or maybe it's Visa, I forget), it's everywhere you want to be. And everywhere you don't. It's constant. It's what this landscape is all about. Constant erosion by wind, rain and snow. Centuries of it. The landscape is filled with barren stretches of nothingness. Rolling sand dunes as far as the eye can see. Harsh stretches of nothing but rock, dirt and the ever-present dust. No plants whatsoever for miles and miles and miles. In areas where plants do exist, they look like they've been planted in craters. The ever-present dust builds up around the plants and over time they too will be buried. They will die and the landscape will have less to hold it all together. The never-ending cycle of centuries continues. The dust hangs in the air and permeates everything. Everything. It's in every crack, crevice, fold and wrinkle. The slightest movement or the slightest of breezes creates it's own miniature storm, the talcum-like dust swirling into the air. It's constant. It raises into the air. It settles. When you "dust" something, anything, within the hour another fine layer settles onto the recently cleaned surface, waiting to be disturbed and distributed again. And again. It's never ending. You breathe it 24-hours a day. It's constant. The only time you really feel clean is immediately upon stepping out of the shower. Within minutes, as you walk back to your tent, those miniature storms rising with every footstep, you feel dusty and dirty again. It's similar to salt water drying on your skin after a swim in the ocean. It permeates the air and suffuses the light. It knocks visibility down to hundreds of meters. It prevents flying operations. It breaks down equipment. It breaks down people. It's in your eyes, it cakes your nose and it fills your lungs. 24-hours a day. Respiratory infections are the largest cause of non-battle injuries here. It grinds your skin like fine, fine sandpaper. Repetitive things you're used to doing, like sit-ups, rubs your skin away. Satellite images look similar to those of the United States in the winter-time, when those big cold fronts swing down from the northwest and move east. Only these images are of dust. Huge, blinding storms of dust raised by 25-30 knot and greater winds. And like centuries before, before we ever heard of the Taliban or Al Qaida, the dust settles. It moves, it settles. On a particular "good" day the sky looks blue again and you can see the mountains to the north. Today, I saw the mountains. Today's a good day. Peace.

Bob

From: Bob Holler [bobflies@mac.com]

Sent: Monday, December 23, 2002

Subject: Haircuts and Holidays

I got my haircut today. I haven't had it cut since before I left and the curls were really starting to, well, curl. For those that don't know, I have real curly hair (wavy might be a better term). I usually get it cut once every week to 10-days. To get it cut I had to walk down to the barber shop. The walk is about a half mile from our tent on Air Force Hill. As I walked down the dusty streets, greeting people along the way, I noticed that I hardly noticed the weapons that everyone was carrying. It's becoming normal. I walked past the rose garden in front of the terminal and there were several Afghani men busily working the garden. The garden is immaculate, there are no weeds and the bushes themselves look very healthy surrounded by irrigation mounds to hold the water in this dust bowl. They're not blooming anymore as it now gets below freezing at night. When I first arrived though they were all in bloom; a sea of reds, yellows and oranges. It's a severe contrast to the surrounding landscape of brown dust, destroyed buildings and up-armor hummers running around with 50-caliber machine guns poking menacingly from their turrets. It's a severe contrast to last year when I first arrived here. Last year when we first arrived here the rose garden was in shambles. Obviously neglected, overgrown with weeds, it was an unkempt, un-trimmed patch of thorns. We used it as our first "out house". A slit trench dug into the center of the garden with quickly made wooden seats hovering above it. An ugly scar in the middle of, what is now, a thing of beauty. Strange how things change. I got to the barber shop a half-hour early to beat the lines (there's over 3000 Army folks here). I brought a book and a cigar with me to pass the time and just sat outside waiting for opening time. The barber shop is housed in what's called a Tier III shelter. It's basically a tent, approximately 16 x 32, with the bottom half of the fabric walls replaced by plywood. The top (or roof) as well as the top half of the walls are the fabric top-half of a GP Medium Tent. The shop opened at 0730Z (1230 local) and by then, there were eight soldiers in line with me. We walked in, and to my surprise there were five female barbers. All white but obviously not American. There were five real barber chairs mounted to a plywood floor with real barber stuff hanging in front of each chair. Foreign folk music of some type played in the background. The interior was all open construction with visible 2 x 4 studs and anything hanging (pictures, clippers, mirrors, scissors etc) is done haphazardly with exposed nails or screws. Electrical wires are visible throughout. Bare bulbs hang down every six feet or so on both sides of the tent. I laid my weapon, radio and book on the floor in front of my chair and the lady who was obviously the cashier, came over and asked me how I wanted my hair cut (since this is an Army-run base I was afraid I would leave there with an "airborne" haircut). I told the cashier how I wanted my hair cut emphasizing (several times) that I didn't want the sides of my head shaved. No "white walls" I repeated. She, in turn, spoke in tongues to the barber who proceeded to cut my hair. She repeated this process with the other customers translating their wishes to the female barbers. Through conversation with the cashier, I learned they were all from Uzbekistan. An opportunity for them to make some serious money she said. As I was getting my haircut, the Uzbeki folk music played with an accompaniment of instruments I couldn't place or even guess at and the barbers talked with each other. The air was filled

From: Bob Holler [bobflies@mac.com]

with a strange mix of foreign sounds but not unpleasantly so. It was as if the other four customers and I were afraid to talk lest we disturb the strange but somehow comforting atmosphere. When the barber was done, the cashier came over and asked if the cut was okay. I asked to get my bangs cut a little shorter (still some visible curl) and once again she spoke in tongues to my barber. The barber quickly obliged (but I think she was a little mad for some reason cause she was rapping pretty hard) and I got out of the chair. After paying my \$5.25 with a five-dollar bill and three cardboard 10-cent pieces (there is no coinage over here) and tipping my barber a dollar, I picked up my stuff to go. As I opened the door to leave the tent, the cashier wished me a Merry Christmas. I turned around to a huge smile. I smiled back, said thank you and wished her one as well. As I walked back to Air Force Hill I thought how strange; here I am in a strange land whose history includes centuries of tribal feuds, ten-plus years of occupation by the Russians and now a dozen or so countries involved in this thing called Enduring Freedom. I'm surrounded by thousands of armed people, there's a rose garden in the middle of nowhere and I just received a Christmas wish from a nice lady with a warm smile from Uzbekistan. How cool is that? Merry Christmas and an even merrier New Year to everyone. May your holidays be as cool as mine. Peace.

Bob

From: Bob Holler [bobflies@mac.com]

Sent: Monday, December 23, 2002 11:48 PM

Subject: Merry Xmas from me and the boys

This is us getting ready to go out on a mission. Peace.

Bob



From: Bob Holler [bobflies@mac.com]

Sent: Wednesday, December 25, 2002

Subject: Me and Dave

David Lettermen stopped by Air Force Hill yesterday (24 Dec) and mingled with the troops. Cool. The Air Force contingent here is fairly small, approximately 200 folks. Dave brought Paul Schaffer and Biff with him too. We all just stood around and bullshit for about 30-minutes. Dave signed some autographs and we all took pictures. I went up and asked him to trade cigars. He gladly agreed. So, I now have a cigar from David Letterman. I plan on smoking that one tomorrow morning. I was going to smoke it today (Christmas) but the soccer game with the Romanians took longer than expected and then we got scrambled to pick up a 3-year old girl who was playing with unexploded ordinance. The ordinance, needless to say is no longer unexploded. We didn't actually get launched, one of the Army medevac helo's got her. She will probably lose her right eye. I'll right about Christmas day under a separate email. For now, Peace.

Bob



From: Bob Holler [bobflies@mac.com]

Sent: Thursday, December 26, 2002

Subject: Christmas in Afghanistan

Christmas in Afghanistan. Woke up about 0530Z (1030 local) and made myself some oatmeal and espresso. Ate my oatmeal and enjoyed a cigar with the espresso. We had a soccer game with the Romanians starting at 0700Z. Let me start with the soccer field. We're not talking a field of grass here. We're not even talking a field of dirt. The soccer field is about 50 yards long and about 20 wide. The goals are slightly miniaturized too. They're approximately 8-feet wide and 6-feet high. Tents and bunkers surround the field. There's exposed tent stakes and grounding rods down the sidelines. Ropes run from the tent stakes to their respective attachment point on their tents. The field itself is half gravel, ¼ mud and ¼ dirt. The gravel is large, sharp shale. Any fall will certainly end in a loss of blood. The parts that are dirt have tire tracks baked into them. Rough 6-inch slits waiting to break an ankle. Before the game we all take to the field and try to "smooth" out the tire tracks with our feet. In front of the southern-most goal is a huge puddle of mud and water. It's approximately 12-feet across and sits 6-feet from the front of the goal. If the Air Force safety Nazis were to see us playing on this field, they'd have a hey-day. They'd literally stop the game and ask, "What the hell were you thinking?" The size of the field limits each team to 6 players plus a goalie. There's no uniforms, no jerseys, just a bunch of guys that want to have some fun and share a little Christmas camaraderie. The game starts with me in the goal. Later on I switch with someone and play in the field. Before switching though, I do leave a small amount of my blood in front of the goal. Payment extracted by the gravel and my competitive nature. The Romanians kick our ass 12-to-4. We all had fun though and surprisingly, no one got hurt. It's about 1000Z and we just arrived in line at the chow tent. We get the call "rescue on alert-15". We all run back to camp and scramble for the airplanes. Apparently a 3-year old girl was playing with unexploded ordinance. It's no longer "unexploded". The Army MEDEVAC helo's take off. We pull backup. The little girl is not hurt to bad but will probably lose her right eye. A miracle considering the circumstances. After about 45-minutes of "alert-15" we herd back to the chow tent. The menu: roast beef, turkey (canned), ham, Alaskan king crab, collard greens, mixed vegetables, dressing and corn on the cob. Inside there's pasta salad, boiled shrimp, cranberry sauce and several types of pies. A great meal considering. We're now back in our tactical operations center, just hanging out. Later, some of the SEAL's from across the base stop by and invite us to their Christmas party. They have turkey's (real ones), roast beef and ham, some awesome beans with sausage in them and rice. We hang out for awhile bullshitting and eating. I manage to sneak in a beer. We head back to the ops tent for a showing of Lord of the Rings. Get to bed about 2330. All-in-all, a great Christmas spent with a great group of people. One that I'll remember forever. I hope yours was half as good as mine spent with those you love. Come to think of it, as good as today was that's the one thing missing. Those I love. Peace.

Bob

From: Bob Holler [bobflies@mac.com]

Sent: Monday, December 30, 2002

Subject: Detour

Hey,

Was on my way from K1 to K2 via C-17 but the weather was so bad at K2 we diverted to Incirlik, Turkey. Cool. Incirlik is a "normal" base with a BX, beer, commissary, beer, bowling alley, beer, rec-center, beer, child care center, beer, schools, beer etc. Needless to say, we had a few beers (okay a whole lot of beer) waiting for our flight out. Our flight cancelled due to weather at our destination so I actually slept in a real room last night with a TV, fridge, real shower, flushing toilet, etc. Slept in this morning and did some laundry. Getting ready to head down-town to see what I can see. Supposed to leave 0-dark-hundred tomorrow morning. We'll see what happens. Hopefully I can get out so I can do my team swap-out. Anyway, having fun here in Turkey but anxious to get back to work. Love you all, take care. Peace.

Bob

From: Bob Holler [bobflies@mac.com]

Sent: Saturday, January 04, 2003

Subject: I Suspected This

As most of you know from following the news, this thing with Iraq is in motion as we speak. I've been extended for an indefinite period of time and will be travelling from here to other exotic lands shortly. Don't know what my connectivity will be upon arrival but just wanted everyone to know that your in my thoughts even if you don't hear from me for awhile. Still having fun, still loving life. Take care of yourselves. Take care of each other. Peace.

Bob

From: Bob Holler [bobflies@mac.com]

Sent: Tuesday, January 07, 2003 1:15 PM

Subject: Flying

I'm back in Afghanistan and I finally found the time to finish my thoughts on flying here. I hope you enjoy the read. I've included a couple of pictures of the landscape. Take care. Peace.

Bob

We went flying the other day (trolling for missions?). Normally we fly at night but this one was mid-day. The weather was clear and cool and the dust was minimal so you could see pretty far into the distance. Flying here is what I would imagine flying in the Mojave would be like. Except for the weapons and body armor and constant threat of engagement. We fly low, 50-feet AGL. The gunners and PJ's constantly scan for threats, our weapons following wherever our eyes wander as if the two were connected. As far as the eye can see there's nothing but brown and multiple shades of brown. Colors vary, from a soft, almost vanilla color to orange to dirt brown to black. The one constant is the landscape is harsh. It varies from smooth, drifting sand dunes with intricate patterns etched on the surface by the blowing winds with absolutely no vegetation - to rocky, craggy, desolate scars in the earth rising 50, 100, 500 feet in elevation with patches, here and there, of plants. Most of the land however, is void of any vegetation whatsoever. What vegetation does grow is limited to two types, a sagebrush looking plant and a grass that grows in clumps with blades that are two to three feet in length. As mentioned in previous email, the plants that do exist are in constant danger of suffocation from the land itself. The plants, half buried in their own craters, struggle to grow in a landscape that will surely smother it over time. And probably sooner rather than later, these areas will become completely void of vegetation too. And then there are the mountains. No foothills to speak of, just sudden sharp, rocky raises in altitude several thousand feet high. In parts of the country there are communities (from 2-3 buildings to small towns) built in the form of compounds. Built of clay and grass, some are simple looking structures while others are elaborate, admirable pieces of architecture with round as well as square buildings. A clay and grass wall several feet thick surrounds the majority of these communities. The reason for the walls I can only guess. Maybe they offer protection from other tribes. Tribal feuds are common and as a matter of fact contribute to a large portion of the political strife that exists here. Or maybe, the walls exist purely for protection from wild animals. In just about all the compounds there's usually a small courtyard or central-square within the walls and there's usually several people congregated there in the compounds that are populated. There are usually several fires going, the smoke curling into the air blending with the constant dust. The buildings, for the most part, have no "physical" doors or windows although the openings exist for them. They appear as shadows, gaping dark holes, which break up the contours of the otherwise constant shades of brown. Glass and wood are obviously scarce commodities out here. Laundry, hanging outside on clotheslines inside the compounds is always present. Strung with brightly colored clothes, the clotheslines provide the only color in an otherwise colorless land and stand out in stark contrast to their surroundings. There are numerous abandoned compounds too. The obvious disrepair, the collapsed walls and roofs of

From: Bob Holler [bobflies@mac.com]

a once thriving community may tell of a failed agricultural attempt or maybe a long ago dried up water source. Who knows? Wherever there is a compound though, there is usually some visible attempt at agriculture. You can see the rows and furrows obviously, painstakingly dug from the clay and attempts at irrigation for those "gardens" but there are no visible signs of green. Even along the few rivers that we fly over the colors remain all shades of brown. More vigorous attempts are made at agriculture along the riverbanks but again; I see no visible signs of green, no signs of life. Maybe whatever they're growing is brown too. The thing I find most strange about this land is the people. Flying out in the middle of nowhere and I mean "nowhere" all of a sudden there are people and camels and longhaired goats. Small, nomadic tribes that live in tents, (very similar to yurts) made of felt and fur, can be found in the most desolate of places. We call them Tuskan Raiders because of their similarity to the race of people in one of the Star Wars movies. The people of these tribes exist out in the middle of nowhere, where in our minds, no man should exist, collecting grass (huge piles of it) for their camels and goats and are undoubtedly content with their lifestyle not having anything to do with (or avoiding) current politics or affairs. I'm sure they would rather be left alone to do what ever it is they do. As we fly over, they come out of their tents and stare at us as we fly by. No waves or enthusiastic greetings, just acknowledgements of our presence. Once in awhile, as we fly over areas completely void of life, all of a sudden a man or a couple of men will appear. They trudge across the landscape carrying piles of grass, huge piles, some as tall as they are. Where they came from and where they're going you cannot tell or even guess. I guess, when you think about it, like us, they're just doing what they do. Like us, they live life a day at a time, trying to make things better for themselves, their families and their communities. Peace.

From: Bob Holler [bobflies@mac.com]



From: Bob Holler [bobflies@mac.com]

Sent: Saturday, January 11, 2003 9:52 AM
Subject: Leaving.....again

I actually left Afghanistan (again) to catch a ride to my new destination but it didn't work out. So I'm back in the 'Ghan and will be leaving in a couple of hours for Germany. From there I'll hop a ride to my new destination. New adventures in a new country. As mentioned in previous email, I don't know what my connectivity will be like upon my arrival but will email as soon as I get the chance. Take care of yourselves. Take care of each other. Peace.

Bob

From: Bob Holler [bobflies@mac.com]

Sent: Sunday, January 26, 2003 12:30 PM

Subject: I'mmmmmmm Baaaaaack! (on email that is)

Sorry for the break but I am now back on the net! It's been an interesting 12 (or so) day's. We've literally carved out a base out of nothing and we finally got our email connectivity up today. I can't say where I am but, as you all know, it's somewhere over here. The guys have done marvelous work over the last 12 days and we're pretty much "there" as far as our "digs" go. We have some nice tents, some great equipment and awesome support from the senior leadership. The guys have spent numerous hours building floors, walls, furniture (a really nice stereo cabinet, a really nice poker table covered in army green wool blanket, computer stations, cabinets, shelving units, etc, etc), putting up tents, prepping gear and of course working out. We've even managed a few games of ultimate frisbee. I'll write a complete story of my adventures soon. Just wanted everyone to know that I was okay. We don't have an APO yet but will forward that as soon as we get one. The word is that the "base" will soon shut down our access to personal email accounts (yahoo, hotmail, mac.com, etc). If that happens, I'll send out my "base email address" to everyone. For now, take care of yourselves and I love you all. Peace.

Bob

From: Bob Holler [bobflies@mac.com]

Sent: Saturday, February 08, 2003 3:01 AM

Subject: New Email

Well, they finally went and did it. They blocked all access to the internet which means I no longer have access to my personal email account. Please note the new address above. For the not so computer smart (yes I know you're out there) it's:

robert.holler@azab.aorcentaf.af.mil

If you replied to or sent email to my mac.com account within the last 48 hours, please resend. On the good new side, we now have an APO it is:

CMSgt Bob Holler
410 AEW/38 ERQS
APO AE, 09371

We're all doing well. Spirits are still high and our compound is the SHIT! A lot of jealousy spreading throughout the camp. Of course there always is. I have to remind everyone that the reason our compound is the SHIT is because my guys work harder than everyone else making it the SHIT! My guys
ROCK! Anyway, I'll catch up with everyone soon. A lot more busy here than in Afghanistan where everything was settled and "routine". Take care and above all, enjoy. Peace.

Bob

From: Bob Holler [bobflies@mac.com]

Sent: Wednesday, February 12, 2003 4:20 AM

Subject: They Must Be Getting Serious

We were all inoculated against smallpox yesterday. We also got our anthrax boosters. Don't really know what the atmosphere is back home but for us it's all business. We've pretty much transitioned from the setup/building phase to the alert/work phase. It's now time to really keep an eye on the boy's. Sitting alert day after day and flying once in awhile makes the lads antsy. It's easy to get bored and lose your edge in this environment. There's still some little things to do around the compound but overall, time is spent waiting. We'll do our best to keep everyone challenged and on their toes though. Wouldn't want them to get too lax. Not a whole lot to report. The weather is down right nasty today. About a 1/2 mile visibility (clouds and dust) and rain. Not too cold though. Take care of yourselves. Take care of each other and above all, enjoy. Peace.

Bob

From: Bob Holler [bobflies@mac.com]

Sent: Friday, February 14, 2003 3:14 PM

Subject: February 14

Just wanted to say Happy Valentines Day to all the girls in my life. Your emails mean a great deal and I really appreciate them. Take care of yourselves and above all, enjoy. Peace.

Bob



From: Bob Holler [bobflies@mac.com]

From: Scarpulla.Terri
Sent: Friday, February 14, 2003 6:49 PM
To: 'Holler, Robert CMSgt 38 ERQS'
Cc: Scarpulla.Joel.P
Subject: RE: February 14

Hey Bob,

Happy Valentine's to you too. Here is a wedding picture. I don't know if you received the one I sent earlier. I don't know if you want to hear this, or maybe you already know, things are pretty tense here. They showed ballistic missiles being moved in to surround the white house, the black hawks flying overhead, and jets with missiles in the air 24 hours. They are advising the public to buy plastic sheeting and duct tape so we may seal up our windows and doors "just in case" of germ or chemical warfare. It's hard to know what to think. Joel and I are just trying to live our lives to the fullest and enjoy each other. We think about you and all the guys in all of our prayers. Anyway, we love you, take care.

Terri



From: Bob Holler [bobflies@mac.com]

From: Holler, Robert CMSgt 38 ERQS
Sent: Saturday, February 15, 2003 11:59 AM
To: Scarpulla.Terri
Subject: RE: February 14

Hello little sister,

Glad to hear that you and Joel are still trying to live. Remember what I told you over a year ago, if you change your life to the point that you don't enjoy, they win. And it doesn't take another mass casualty, another bullet or another bomb. I read something that the home defense guy (I forget his name) said recently and I agree wholeheartedly; the best message we can send to the terrorists after another attack (if one were to occur) is to show up at work the next day. Unfortunately, we have to learn to live like the Israelis have been living for years. Terrorism is now part of our lives. Hopefully, it will never reach the level (everyday occurrences) that it is at in Israel but live with it we must. You guys keep doing what you're doing, live everyday to it's fullest, never take each other or anything for that matter for granted and above all, enjoy. I love you both. Peace.

Bob

P.S. I've included a link here
<http://www.af.mil/news/airman/0200/pj.htm>
about PJ's. Could you pass it on to those at work? It's humorous but gets the point across. It starts with a kid going through training by the name of Jason Cunningham. Jason was in my unit and was killed last year in Afghanistan living by the motto "These Things We Do...That Others May Live"

Superman School

Airman

Only the strong of body & mind survive the 'pipeline,' the world's toughest school



Jason Cunningham's body begged for air. Submerged 9 feet under, the airman's lungs prickled and burned, feeling as if they'd burst like a pair of overinflated truck tires. By reflex, his nervous system declared a state of emergency — DEFCON 1. Every instinct urged him to burst to the surface

and suck in cool, fresh air.

But he ignored the red alert blaring in his brain and stayed below for several minutes. Soon the throbbing in his chest ceased, his peripheral vision collapsed and the world around him faded to black.

Cunningham lost consciousness and sank to the bottom of the pool.

Immediately, a group of rugged men wearing black neoprene suits and scuba gear hauled him out of the pool and revived him. One of the men, who hovered over him, asked, "You OK? You OK? Did you meet the wizard?"

At the time, still reeling from the fog of delirium, Cunningham

could only manage a gurgled "Huh?" but later recounted his near-death experience.

[CONTINUE . . .](#)

by Master Sgt. Pat McKenna
photos by Master Sgt. Dave Nolan

to the beginning
of the story



"Once you pass out the first time, you get used to it," said the 24-year-old from Camarillo, Calif. "It's like — it hurts, it hurts, and boom, you're asleep. Then you wake up, some-body's slapping your face, and you've got this oxygen mask covering your mouth. It's really not that bad, no big deal."

Excuse me — No big deal? For most people, drowning ranks pretty high in the "big deal" department, right up there with electrocution, decapitation and being buried alive. But Cunningham isn't what you'd call most people. He's going through the toughest school on the planet in hopes of becoming an Air Force pararescueman, also commonly called a "PJ," which comes from the old

symbol on aircrew orders for parachutist.

And a PJ is far from being your average Joe Six-pack. Like the Navy's SEALs, the Marine's Force Recon and the Army's Green Berets, Air Force pararescuemen stake claim to being the best of the best in the military. They're a crack fighting force — lean, lethal and lightning quick. Calling them "elite" may sound like a cliché, yet there's no other word for it. While SEALs and Green Berets teem in the thousands, the Air Force treasures the mere 300 active-duty pararescuemen they have primed and ready for action.

Cunningham, a former Navy petty officer, even considered a hitch with the SEALs, going so far as passing the grueling frogman fitness test, but had a change of heart after his tryout.

"I didn't want to kill people. I want to save them," said Cunningham, now an airman first class.

Unlike other special operators, who search and destroy, PJs "search and save." Think of them as SEALs with stethoscopes. They're extreme emergency medical technicians, a kind of cross between Schweitzer and Schwarzenegger. In a pinch, a PJ is a pilot's best friend, and the bad guy's worst enemy, just as accurate with a 9mm pistol as he is with a syringe. One minute, you might find these Rambo's of resuscitation subduing an enemy patrol and the next, jump-starting a heart with a pair of defibrillator paddles.

Most of these ninja paramedics belong to combat search and rescue teams, where they're charged with locating downed aircrews behind enemy lines, patching them up and spiriting them away to safety. If given a choice, PJs prefer avoiding

confrontation. It's too messy.

"We're not about death and destruction, and blowing stuff up. We want to get in and get out ... no fuss, no muss," said Master Sgt. Craig Guthridge, a veteran PJ and director of operations for the Pararescue School at Kirtland Air Force Base, N.M. "But we're not going to raise the white flag the first time the enemy says 'boo!' either. We're just as skilled in taking lives as we are at saving them. And sometimes you have to do bad stuff to get the good guy out."

Sink or swim

Gaining admittance into this exclusive fraternity (law excludes women from volunteering) demands that pararescue candidates endure a two-year long initiation ritual called the "pipeline" — a gauntlet of coursework and instruction taught at military bases scattered across the country. It's a killer curriculum; about 90 percent of the applicants wash out. And most don't even make it past the entrance exam — a physical fitness test that'd have your average jock doubled over wheezing. (See "Could you pass this test?" Page 9)



Pararescuemen shatter the stereotype popular among other services that airmen are cream puffs living a pampered existence and whose idea of roughing it is sharing a room at the Hotel Intercontinental.

"I love to see the Army guys gain an appreciation of the Air Force. Most of them think we're a bunch of wussies, that is, until we pass them in the pool," said Master Sgt. Steve Sanko, a

pararescue instructor at the Army's combat divers school in Key West, Fla.

Well, not all think that way. One Army Special Forces sergeant major, who asked not to be identified, said, "PJs are the best trained special ops forces in the Defense Department — bar none — but you'll never hear me admit that in public."

The philosophy behind the rigorous regimen boils down to this — the more you sweat in training, the less you bleed in combat. And by the time a PJ pledge finishes plodding through the pipeline, he's sweated an ocean. In the process, he's become an expert marksman, accomplished parachutist, mountain climber, scuba diver and a certified emergency medical technician (See "Training like they fight" Page 10).

While riding the pipeline, he's learned to whoosh down a 30-foot fast rope from a hovering helicopter. He's scaled sheer rock faces and traversed craggy cliffs at elevations that'd give a mountain goat a nosebleed. He's parachuted on moonless nights into choppy seas while lugging on his back an 80-pound rucksack containing a portable operating room. And he's braved a witches' brew of climates and

conditions, surviving in the wild on his wits and own devices.

"Although you can never really simulate combat, the pipeline is very adept at preparing you for the real deal. All the training they throw at you, all the 'PT,' the stress, both physical and mental, everything you go through is as close as it gets," said Staff Sgt. Jeremy Hardy, a PJ, who dodged flak and missiles last year during a rescue mission in Bosnia.

Gut check

Pushing the envelope of human endurance emerges as a central theme in pararescue training. At every stage of the pipeline, your body and mind get taxed to its breaking point — to the very brink of total collapse — and you must find somewhere deep within yourself the grit to forge ahead, even when every sinew screams "uncle."

And nothing tests a man's mettle more than the first hurdle in the pipeline — the 10-week Pararescue/Combat Control Indoctrination Course at Lackland AFB, Texas. Indoc reveals early on who'll throw in the towel when faced with adversity. But better to find out now that a man's fainthearted before he's squirming at the end of a hoist while bullets whistle past.

"We want to break the students down, crack them open, and peek inside them to see what they're made of," said Sanko, the scuba instructor. "We want to find out how they'll react after missing 24 hours of sleep, when they're totally spent, sore and hungry, when they're humping that rucksack up the side of the mountain in the cold and rain. We want to find out if they're quitters. Without drive and determination, you'll fail the mission. If you fail in the pool, no problem, we'll drag you out and send you home. But fail on a mission and you come home in a body bag. Maybe your whole team comes home in body bags."

Master Sgt. Tim Wilkinson, a PJ who's landed in more hotspots than a Tom Clancy character, said, "Indoc is a gut check. We want to know if you're the type of person who'll stick it out when the chips are down."

Indeed, the course makes workouts at boot camp look like a sixth-grade phys ed class. The pain commences at 4:30 a.m. and doesn't end until well after sunset. Students double-time through a daily routine of circuit training on weight machines, swimming, running, and huffing and puffing through 50-odd combinations of calisthenics with names like cherry pickers, steam engines and mountain climbers. By the time they reach the end of the second month, trainees must crank out — in perfect form, mind you — 70 push-ups, 75 sit-ups, 13 pull-ups, 14 chin-ups and 85 flutter kicks, each within two minutes and with little rest in between. They must also run six miles within 45 minutes, swim 50 meters underwater on a single breath, and swim 4,000 meters on the surface under 80 minutes.

For an extra sock in the solar plexus, the schoolhouse staff convenes frequent "smoke sessions," which are punishing marathon workouts that make recruits "feel the burn." Also, committing the most miniscule infraction merits your entire flight "getting dropped" for a set of 50 remedial push-ups plus extra reps dedicated to every instructor in the area and another for the pararescue corps. It's not unusual for the group to pound out 800 or a thousand push-ups in a day. The administration calls it "teambuilding," and if they think a class isn't functioning as a single, motivated unit, they heap on another incentive to bond — lugging around a 450-pound piece of iron railroad track called the "rail" between classrooms and sites.



Click for caption

"When I arrived at indoc, I thought I was in shape but found out within the first five minutes I wasn't in 'PJ' shape," said Airman 1st Class Adrian Durham, a 22-year-old former lifeguard from Hartford, Conn., now in the pipeline. "To keep myself going during the smoke sessions, I told myself the pain's got to end sometime. Then at some point, your muscles become so numb you just stop caring."

All these drills, however, serve only to warm up recruits for the persecution in the pool. Officials have dubbed the pool sessions "water confidence training," which is like calling a beating with a baseball bat "hickory familiarization." The water weeds out more candidates than any other activity. There's something about inhaling a lung-full of pool water that saps a man's resolve, prodding him to question his commitment.

Between indoc and combat divers school in Key West, students spend more time performing in the pool than Shamu, but without the pleasure of drenching onlookers. Instead, the waterlogged warriors slosh around wearing 16-pound weight belts; tread water; tie knots at the bottom of the pool; and swim and bob with bound feet and hands during an exercise called drownproofing. For many, buddy breathing makes or breaks them. The drill pairs two students, who must share a snorkel for several minutes while instructors splash, harass and dunk them. Surface more than once to gasp for breath and you fail.

"To an outsider, the training may look abusive or like hazing," Sanko said. "But if you panic on a real dive and shoot to the surface, you may explode a lung or get the 'bends.' The ocean is very unforgiving, and at least here, we give you two chances."

Men of steel

For those steely and stout enough to survive the first few weeks of indoc, Motivation Week looms. It's a feared and fabled rite of passage, the Air Force's version of SEAL Hell Week. During this ultimate test, black-shirted instructors prowl the ranks,

dispensing less mercy than the Terminator doing a drive-by, spraying students with icy jets of water from a garden hose and barking orders at the airmen, who all seemed to be named "you." "Get off that wall, you!" "Hey, you! Keep those legs straight!" "You want to quit, you? Then quit!"

Regardless of the circumstances, students answer every question with the same response — "Hoo-yah!" which is a catch-all phrase meaning everything from "yes" and "no" to "You talking to me?" and "Please, make the pain stop!"

Said Cunningham: "Motivation week is downright evil. It's ugly ... chaotic. It's nonstop training, constant screaming, smoke sessions one after the other, and only a couple hours of sleep a night. When you finally get a chance to put your head on a pillow at night, you're out in seconds.

"Thinking of my family motivated me to suck it up and press on. I have a wife, a daughter and another on the way who've sacrificed a lot for me to be here," the airman said. "They're counting on me, and I'm going to earn it for them. Plus, I've had my butt kicked too many times to give up. Anybody who has ever quit regretted it the next day. I don't want to be that guy."



According to instructors, it's impossible to predict, at first glance, who'll stay the course and graduate. Naturally, you'd expect those muscle-bound troglodytes, who dwell in the free weight rooms of gyms, to have a good shot at making the grade, but that's not usually the case. Because of low body fat, these hulks usually sink faster than a snitch in a cement overcoat.

"It doesn't make a difference if you're an NCAA swimmer or some big, buff stud. You've got to have smarts and a heart — the total package," Sanko said. "Usually, it's the mean little dog who makes it through."

Wilkinson agrees that success is often a matter of mind over muscle. "Pararescue is a thinking man's game. You can't be 'strong like bull, smart like tractor,' " he said.

Nobody back home in Hartford ever pictured Durham as a camouflaged commando. Friends and family thought of him as a bookworm, even nicknaming him the "absent-minded professor," because he preferred academics to athletics. They figured him for a librarian, schoolteacher or accountant.

"I fooled them," Durham said. "I hate sitting down at a desk so when I saw the pararescue brochure at the recruiter's office, I said this is the ticket. I can be a high-speed operator — skydiving, scuba diving, rock climbing, ice climbing — all the things I could never do before because I couldn't afford them. And now they'll pay

me for it.”

Although PJs receive extra pay for their special duties, none concede they're in it for the money. Most admit they're adrenaline junkies, 'jonesing' for challenges, adventures and the "rush" that a 9-to-5 grind couldn't offer. Others cite compassion for their fellow man, patriotism, and the pararescue corps' esteemed and legendary heritage for volunteering.

Of the 21 Air Force Crosses given to enlisted men for extraordinary heroism, 11 were awarded to para-rescuemen. During the Korean War, PJs plucked pilots out of the frigid Sea of Japan; extricated aircrews from the jungles of Vietnam; rescued Rangers during a bloody firefight on the streets of Mogadishu, Somalia; and saved the skin of several airmen during the most recent conflict in Kosovo. Furthermore, PJs pitched in during the SS Mayaguez rescue mission off Cambodia's coast in 1975, raided the North Vietnamese Song Tay prison camp in 1970, helped evacuate Saigon, recovered astronauts on Gemini and Apollo missions, and continue to provide support for NASA shuttle launches and landings.

Today's generation of pararescuemen share much with their PJ patriarchs. They both possess a tight-jawed tenacity, a stubborn will to never surrender, and a competitive spirit that'd turn a game of solitaire violent.

Look! Up in the sky!

You see the same fire burning brightly in the eyes of the new breed of PJs like Staff Sgt. Doug Isaacks. The 25-year-old native of Anaheim, Calif., just wrapped up his two-year trial through the pipeline last September. When he initially applied for retraining into the pararescue field while a cop at Dyess Air Force Base, Texas, more than a few of his contemporaries at the security forces squadron scoffed at him, telling him he'd most certainly fail and betting he'd be back patrolling the perimeter within weeks.

“All I heard were the statistics, the high washout rates, like only one in a hundred makes it. Nobody gave me much of a chance,” said Isaacks, who looks as strong as a Clydesdale. “But I did it, and it's one of the greatest moments of my life. It feels great to be part of something special — a brotherhood. It's also changed me as a person, boosting my self-esteem and my confidence. I know now that I'll never quit no matter what.”

Last September, Isaacks left for his first pararescue assignment at a special tactics unit at Hurlburt Field, Fla., but a pressing matter delayed him. He first had to drop by Dyess so he could strut through his old squadron sporting his new maroon beret. It's not that he wants to rub it in that everybody underestimated him, but he told you so.

And who's going to argue with a PJ?

From: Bob Holler [bobflies@mac.com]

Superman School

Page 7 of 7

[\[Could you pass this test?\]](#) [\[Training like they fight\]](#)

[Feedback](#)

[Home](#)

<http://www.af.mil/news/airman/0200/pj2.htm>

2/20/2003

Could you pass this test?

Think you've got what it takes to be a pararescueman? Find out by seeing if you can pass the PAST, that is, the Physical Abilities and Stamina Test. It's sort of a special ops SAT for the pararescue pipeline. It's the bare minimum physical requirements for acceptance into the program and to advance through all of its phases. Proctors administer the test in the order listed, and it must be completed within three hours. You get three minutes of rest between each of the calisthenics.

- Swim 25 meters underwater on one breath.
- Swim 1,000 meters sidestroke or freestyle in 26 minutes or under.
- Run 1.5 miles in under 10 minutes and 30 seconds.
- Pull off eight chin-ups in a minute or less
- Do 50 sit-ups in 2 minutes or less
- Pound out 50 push-ups in 2 minutes or less
- Complete 50 flutter kicks in 2 minutes or less

If you're interested in taking the plunge into the pararescue career field, call the special tactics and rescue recruiting team at Randolph Air Force Base, Texas, at (210) 652-3170 or DSN 487-3170.

Training like they fight

Before a candidate can claim the title pararescueman and earn the right to wear the maroon beret, he'll spend anywhere from 18 to 24 months learning the basics of his craft. The combat curriculum consists of courses taught by Army and Air Force special operators, and boasts one of the most arduous training regimens in the military, producing the world's most highly skilled warriors. The program, nicknamed the "Pipeline," includes the following courses:

* **Pararescue/Combat Control Indoctrination Course**, 10 weeks, Lackland AFB, Texas. Both students and instructors agree that if you tough out "indoc," you'll likely slog your way through the rest of pipeline. That's because indoc is like Ironman 101. It's a two-month-long triathlon of training: a sadistic routine of running, swimming and calisthenics that eliminates those mentally and physically unprepared for the rigors of the job. Much of the course concentrates on pool work — weightbelt swims, water treading, buddy breathing and drownproofing. It's a trial by water that gives students confidence in the deep, readying them for scuba school.



Click for caption

* **U.S. Army Special Operations Underwater School**, four weeks, Key West, Fla. Pararescue candidates sink to new depths, becoming combat divers and earning their "bubble" badge during this course, teaching students to "dive!, dive!, dive!" Pool week runs the first seven days, and to some, may look like water torture. If you survive treading water with a 16-pound belt or bobbing for precious breaths with your hands tied behind your back with feet bound, instructors then tie

knots in your regulator hose, tear off your mask and harass you underwater. Next, students learn to infiltrate hostile waters, navigate by compass and to survive equipment failure at murky depths while using scuba and closed-circuit rebreathing gear. To pass the course, pararescuemen must complete a 3,000-meter underwater navigation swim.

* **U.S. Navy Underwater Egress Training**, one day, Pensacola Naval Air Station, Fla. After scuba school, underwater egress must feel like playtime in the kiddie pool. This course instructs aircrews to escape a sinking aircraft by strapping them into a "dunker," which is dropped into a bone-chilling pool and immediately flipped upside down. Students must quickly unbuckle themselves and swim out. According to pararescue lore, sailors have had to coax a few showoffs out of the dunker, after they've stayed submerged several minutes holding their breath.

* **U.S. Army Airborne School**, three weeks, Fort Benning, Ga. Pipeline students learn to leap before they look, overcoming their innate fear of jumping out of perfectly good aircraft. During the course, pararescuemen learn "mass exit" techniques, make five parachute jumps using a static line, and receive their "jump" wings.

* **U.S. Air Force Survival School**, two and half weeks, Fairchild AFB, Wash. Pararescue recruits "learn to return" after an aircraft bailout or crash. The course instructs aircrews to evade and escape the enemy, and if captured, resist. Students spend a week in the field, living off the land with only the meager equipment and supplies in their rucksacks (See "Staying Alive," November '99 Airman).

* **U.S. Army Military Freefall Parachutist School**, five weeks, Fort Bragg, N.C., and Yuma Proving Ground, Ariz. This more advanced parachutist course teaches pipeline pupils to freefall from high altitudes with mini-oxygen bottles. Students learn body stabilization techniques in a wind tunnel, how to rig and repack parachutes, recognize hypoxia (oxygen starvation), mass exits, night operations and make 30 freefall jumps.

* **Special Operations Combat Medic Course**, 22 weeks, Fort Bragg, N.C. Students get hands-on training on how to patch up the wounded, learning advanced first aid, trauma medicine, triage, evacuation, minor field surgery and airway management. The course culminates on the streets of New York City, where students learn to treat stab and gunshot wounds. Graduates earn emergency medical technician certification from the National Registry.

* **Pararescue Recovery Specialist Course**, 20 weeks, Kirtland AFB, N.C. This final course puts it all together, combining all their previous coursework into practical application. It's the pararescue finishing school. Students receive advanced medical training and learn tactical movement, weapons handling, air operations, mountain climbing and aircrew recovery procedures. Before they can "blouse their boots" and don their berets, students must spend a week in the Pecos Mountains putting to use all they've learned during a final exam in the field.

From: Bob Holler [bobflies@mac.com]

Sent: Friday, February 21, 2003 1:29 AM

Subject: Another Day In The Life...

Hope you enjoy. Take Care. Peace.
Bob

Another Day In The Life... Our Day Off

I woke up at around 0700Z. I sat up in bed and stretched (one of those good, long, cat type stretches) and slipped on my running shoes (Asics for those who care). Notice I said slipped. My parents always told me when I was young, "when you start buying your own shoes you can start putting them on and taking them off without untying them..." I don't untie my shoes. I grabbed my shaving kit, toothbrush and towel and headed to the exit of the tent. There are nine people in my tent and I live all the way back in the left hand corner. Each guy has his "space" separated from the next guys with poncho liners hung from 550-cord stretched from one side of the tent to the other. Some guys have headboards that we made from 3/4-inch plywood in their spaces. The headboards are shelving units; one-foot deep, that the head of your bed or cot slips into with shelves above and running down one side. It's a nice setup for storing clothes, pictures, cigars, whatever. Others just store their stuff on a second cot. Still, others have a second cot flipped upside down, suspended by four sticks (used for suspending mosquito nets), directly above their sleeping cot and tied in place, the bottom of the suspended cot serving as a storage shelf. As I opened the vestibule flap to the outside the suns incredibly blinding light hit me (The vestibule is an entranceway, if you will, approximately 8-feet long, to the tent with entrance/exit flaps to the outside and to the living area of the tent. It prevents light and weather from actually entering the living area.). The white gravel that we had laid in our tent area to keep the dust and mud down accentuated the intensity of the light even further blinding me. After taking, literally, a few minutes to adjust to the glare, I headed over to the PJ. The PJ-858, oddly enough, is the model of the "Poly John" that we have in our area. Nothing special as far as portapotties go, made and patented in the good ole U.S. of A. After taking care of business, I headed over to the water buffalo to brush my teeth, shave and clean up. For those that are unfamiliar, a water buffalo is a 450-gallon water tank on wheels. It has a pair of spigots on both sides of the trailer-tongue and a household type hose-bib on the back. Our buffalo has a custom made "sink" on one side of it that services one pair of spigots. The sink is made of plywood with an appropriate angle built in to ensure the water always drains to the drain hole cut into the bottom of the "sink". The real purpose of the "sink" is to have a place to set dishes, tap razors, etc. when you're using the spigots. Another reason is to channel the water so it doesn't splash all over your feet. The water is channeled to a piece of corrugated tin roofing. The tin routes the water away from the buffalo to a French drain that we dug that routes the water away further to a rock field that was actually built as a water holding area. It's a great arrangement that keeps the mud and insects to a minimum. As an aside, it's things like the "sink" and French drain that the "Chief" (that's me) thinks up and then the guys design, build and put into operation. As I approached the water buffalo this particular morning, I soaked up the

warmth of the sun and the stillness of the air and thought to myself “what a fucking great morning”. I set my stuff down, opened a bottle of water (our only source of potable water is bottled water), brushed my teeth and then lathered up and started to shave. The water is cold but unlike my early days in Afghanistan last year, at least there’s no ice to break up. As a matter of fact, the air temperature was already near 67-68 degrees. After shaving, washing my hair and myself in general, I meandered back to my tent, again, enjoying the morning for what it was, glorious. Once back in the tent I put on my SPANC (Special Purpose Attire, Non-Camouflage) shorts and went back outside without a shirt. Have I mentioned that it was a glorious day? I walk over to the Pararescue Combat Operations Center (PCOC – some prefer to call it the Pararescue COC....really) to brew up some espresso to go with my morning cigar. Once brewed, I head back outside to just sit, enjoy the sun, a cigar and some espresso. As I’m sitting and enjoying the day the compound continues to stir, as does the air. Just a little. Before long, the entire camp is out and about. Normally they would be getting ready for first muster (a meeting, usually where daily duties are handed out) but today is a down day (no flying, no alert...a day off). I usually hold my first muster at 1000Z. 1000Z allows the guys to sleep in a little (getting prepped for that night cycle), get some chow (lunch) and then I can work them hard for 5 ½ hours before my final muster at 1530Z (used for recapping the day, briefing the alert schedule, getting a current intelligence brief and handing out duties for the next day). Again, as an aside, I know 5 ½ hours doesn’t sound like much but the guys bust their asses for those hours every day. That time is my time. It doesn’t include the time they’re on alert, prepping their gear, flying or working out. That’s my 5 ½ hours. Time we spend on team projects. Like the “sink” or putting up tents, building furniture, building floors for tents, filling sand bags, building defensive fighting positions etc. Anyway, as 1000Z approaches, the wind starts to pick up. And up. By the time 1000Z rolls around the wind is howling. It’s blowing steady, 25 miles per hour with gusts up to 30. We quickly focus on battening down the hatches. Another hour goes by and the wind increases to 30 miles per hour gusting to 35. The wind is furious and getting worse. Being outside is like walking around in a sandblasting barrel. The airborne grit burns your exposed skin. Even with glasses on, the wind finds every weakness in your attempted defenses and fills your eyes with dirt and dust. Thankfully though, it’s warm. The high reaches 74 degrees. The tents are put to the test as the winds pick up to 42 miles per hour with gusts up to 48 with nothing in the landscape to stop or alter its path. The noise of the wind is a constant roaring. The tents pop and snap with shotgun loudness as the wind ripples the fabric from one end of the tent to the other. The pops and snaps threaten to tear the very fabric that issues each loud protest. The noises are relentless and over the next couple of hours they wear you down. The day turns into one of hunkering down. Everyone stays inside unless absolutely necessary. I change and go to the gym to get a workout in. Thankfully, the gym we built is inside a hard building. It’s quiet but not quiet. The noise has changed from the roar of the wind to the roar of “angry youth music” as I do my 7-exercise pyramid routine. As 1530 nears, the wind starts to die. A little. After the 1530 muster, I take a trip to the main side of the base for a shower and some dinner (we don’t have shower facilities in our compound yet). The wind dies further. Afterwards, the boss and I drive to tent city to do some laundry. We quickly get into four of the ten available washers and we have no problems with dryers either as there are twenty of them available. The winds continue to die further. Once

From: Bob Holler [bobflies@mac.com]

back in the compound, I grab another cigar and a water bottle mixed with scotch. I go out into the night to enjoy a good smoke a drink and to reflect. The air is once again totally still. The night sky is incredible, the stars are out in force and the sky totally crystal. The cigar is superb and the scotch-and-water just right. I take it all in gazing into the night sky and think, “what a fucking great day”.



From: Bob Holler [bobflies@mac.com]



From: Bob Holler [bobflies@mac.com]

Sent: Monday, March 03, 2003 3:58 PM
Subject: Anniversary's

Tonight, at 2000-hours, we had a muster in the HAS. The reason for the muster was to honor an anniversary. Tomorrow, 4 Mar 03, is the one-year anniversary of the death of Jason D. Cunningham. Jason was a fellow pararescueman who was killed on 4 Mar 02 during Operation ANACONDA in Afghanistan. He was from my unit and he left behind a wife and two daughters. You may be asking yourselves "why is he telling me this?" My answer is simple; so we don't forget. So we know, understand and remember that this operation has real people prosecuting it. Jason gave his life doing what I've done for the past 28+ years. He gave his life saving 10 others. He gave his life living by the motto; "These Things We Do...That Others May Live," a motto that inherently exposes those who live by it to increased risk. Jason was awarded the Air Force Cross (posthumously) for his actions on Robert's Ridge that day. The Air Force Cross is the second highest decoration (second only to the Medal of Honor) that can be awarded to an individual. Of the 23 Air Force Crosses awarded to enlisted members in the history of the Air Force, 11 of them were awarded to pararescuemen. It is with honor and awe that I do what I do for this place we call "America". Help us remember by observing a moment of silence during your day tomorrow. Thanks to everyone for your support; the emails, the packages the friendships. Take care of yourselves and above all, enjoy. But remember. Peace.

Bob



From: Bob Holler [bobflies@mac.com]

Sent: Sunday, March 16, 2003 2:17 PM
Subject: Another Day In The Life...

Hello everyone. Another installment of a day over here. Hope everyone is well and that things are right in your world. Just as a note, whenever things kick off, our ability to phone and email will be cutoff. Don't know how long we'll be down but as soon as we're able, I'll let you know how we're doing. Also included two pictures of our compound. Enjoy. Peace.

Bob

It's 0500. It's cloudy, rainy and chilly. 54 degrees. "EXERCISE, EXERCISE, EXERCISE, CONDITION YELLOW, MOPP 0" is broadcast over the "Giant Voice", a series of speakers throughout the base used for passing vital force-protection information to everyone. "CONDITION YELLOW" indicates that an attack is probable within 30 minutes. MOPP stands for Mission Oriented Protective Posture and the numbers, 0, 2 or 4 indicate the level of chemical protection you should be wearing at any given time. Zero means you need to carry your chemical protection (mask, suit, gloves and boots) but you don't need to wear them...yet. I grab my stuff and head to the Hardened Aircraft Shelter (HAS). HAS's are a common site in this part of the world, obvious, incongruous mounds set in otherwise flat terrain. They have the shape of a tube, cut in half lengthwise, set on the ground forming an arch. They're typically made of hardened, reinforced concrete, several feet thick. They're approximately 120 feet long and 60 feet wide (big enough to fit two fighter-type airplanes in one). The doors, made of heavy steel, several feet thick, are suspended on a single hinge with steel; railroad-car type wheels that roll on steel tracks much like a railroad track. Surprisingly, the doors are balanced well enough that they can be opened and closed just by using a hand-crank. The combination of the arch, the reinforced concrete and the heavy steel doors serve to deflect and/or outright protect, whatever is inside, from the effects of bombs, mortars, gunfire or other acts of violent intent. We have a HAS in our compound that we use as our shelter, a riggers loft and a gym. As I make my way to the HAS, others, in various stages of dress, are also proceeding to our "shelter". Once inside, I have one of my guys conduct a roll call, ensuring everyone is accounted for. I quickly assign fire-teams to man the defensive fighting positions (foxholes) in the case of a ground attack. I also assign sweep teams, to conduct post-attack sweeps. Sweep teams check for unexploded ordinance, check detection devices for the presence of chemicals, look for wounded or KIA, etc. We settle down to "play the game". After 30-minutes or so, "EXERCISE, EXERCISE, EXERCISE once again comes over the Giant Voice. "CONDITION RED, MOPP 4" blares over the horn. "CONDITION RED" as you can guess means we're being attacked. "MOPP 4" means we're being attacked with suspected chemical or biological weapons. We all quickly don our chemical ensemble, conduct our buddy checks and settle in for the inevitable "CONDITION BLACK" call. When everyone is wearing a chem-mask, things all of a sudden get quiet. At least from a "people talking and chatting" perspective. All you hear is your own breathing, "Darth Vader" style. Inhale, exhale. Inhale, exhale. You sit and wait and get absorbed into your own thoughts. My thoughts wander initially to home. Then off they go, on their own, to work stuff, to friends, family, to my dog. I miss him. I think about my daughter. I

From: Bob Holler [bobflies@mac.com]

miss her too. Inhale, exhale. Inhale, exhale. The HAS is inundated with noises. Jets taking off and landing. A helicopter doing a hover check. The ever present, 24-hours-a-day, 7-days-a-week, roar of the generator. The constant 100-kilowatts of power produced, every second of every day, just to keep our small part of the whole camp operational. The hum of the 8 environmental control units (air conditioner/heater units) constantly pumping heated air (at least for now) into our living and work areas adds to the mix. It's a cacophony of sound that you don't usually hear...until now. Somehow, you realize, you get used to it and your brain blocks it all out. But now, you hear it all. Inhale, exhale, the roar of a jet taking off, the generator, the ECU's, people mumbling, trying to talk through the air-tight seal of their masks. Inhale, exhale. Everyone looks like some sort of mutant bugs with fly-like eyes and big off center snouts. There's nothing to do except wait. Eventually, the call comes "EXERCISE, EXERCISE, EXERCISE, CONDITION BLACK, MOPP 4". The sweeper teams exit the HAS to do their sweep. They come back 20-minutes later and report "all clear". There are no chemicals, no unexploded bombs, no dead or wounded. Inhale, exhale. Another hour-and-a-half goes by. You think of the things you could be doing. Inhale, exhale. Finally, EXERCISE, EXERCISE, EXERCISE, CONDITION GREEN, NO MOPP" is heard and is promptly greeted with a sudden rise of human voices as everyone takes their masks off. We turn our gear, leave the HAS and head back to work amidst grumblings of "what a waste of time", and "this is bullshit". Outside the HAS, the sun is playing between the clouds, though it's still cold and windy. Back at work (did I ever really leave work?), I think about the "waste of time" we just went through. We played the game, sure, but there were other, more important, things we could have been doing, right? This thought plays on my mind as I smoke a cigar, huddled behind a shipping container, away from the wind. Why do these guys, whose job it is to save lives, think of exercises designed to save their own lives as "a waste of time"? What could be more important than preparing for our mission? Saving your own life? The thought tosses around in my head. Why do the guys think the way they do? Is it because of the way we're trained/bred; "It is my duty as a pararescueman...to save lives and aid the injured...placing these things above personal desires or comforts...?" Or is it because they don't take the threat seriously? I think about that. These guys will spend countless hours, and sometimes days, going over and over and over their gear. It can take hours just figuring out how to best carry an additional hand-grenade. No, it's not that they don't take it seriously. These are all serious guys with a serious mission and a serious mindset to match. Most of the guys here are recent veterans of Afghanistan, some highly decorated for their actions. So what is it? After much thought (and a few more cigars), I've come to the conclusion (and lacking a better answer) that it's the way we're trained/bred. We are so focused on our mission that everything, and I mean EVERYTHING, takes a back seat. We tend to see things in black and white when it comes to our mission. We exist for one reason and one reason only and that's to rescue and recover downed airmen and isolated personnel. And, in so doing, we live by the motto: These Things We Do, That Others May Live. That OTHERS May Live. Jason Cunningham, a PJ who was killed in action on a mountaintop in Afghanistan last year, lived by that motto while saving ten others and without realizing it, set the bar that the rest of us MUST aspire to. I say must, because to do anything less would be out of character, dishonorable and just plain unacceptable. I'm surrounded by a bunch of guys with type-A

From: Bob Holler [bobflies@mac.com]

personalities, who have been "brainwashed" into thinking they can do anything...but for the right reasons. I'm a lucky guy in that regard. And I guess that's the real bottom line; we will do the right things, for the right reasons at the right time. We will do anything to live by the motto. Because, that's who we are and that's what we do. I love my job. Peace.

Living By The Motto...

Bob



From: Bob Holler [bobflies@mac.com]



From: Bob Holler [bobflies@mac.com]

Sent: Monday, March 17, 2003 2:01 PM
Subject: Thanks

You guys (and gals) at IGT ROCK!!!! Thanks so much for the video clips.
Although I still can't put faces to names, it's nice seeing someone behind the "blind" emails I've been sending. Take care of yourselves, take care of each other, keep smiling and above all, enjoy...for there is no better time than now. Peace.

Bob

P.S. Terri and Joel, I love you guys. Take care.

From: Bob Holler [bobflies@mac.com]

From: Vic & Sally Johnson

Sent: Saturday, March 22, 2003 1:08 PM

Subject: Another Day In The Life of Bob Holler

Thought you all would like to see a picture of Bob at work

<http://www.defendamerica.mil/photoessays/march2003/p031803a1.html>

Vic Johnson

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Pararescue



Pararescuemen from the 38th Rescue Squadron, deployed from Moody Air Force Base, Ga., and the 58th Rescue Squadron, from Nellis Air Force Base, Nev., board a C-130 for a high-altitude low-opening, or HALO, free-fall drop from 12,999 feet at an undisclosed location in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. Pararescue's mission is the recovery of downed aircrew members and or isolated personnel. Using a C-130 to jump in provides pararescue the fastest way to get to the distressed and provide them with medical attention, protection, and survival. U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Jeremy T. Lock

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From: Bob Holler [bobflies@mac.com]

Sent: Sunday, March 23, 2003 5:34 PM

Subject: Not a good day

The word is already out. It's in the news. A helicopter crashed in Afghanistan while trying to prosecute a mission. It was a rescue helicopter and two of the deceased are from my unit. Although I can't tell details or names, I can tell you they will be missed. Let's not forget the "other" war that's still going on in Afghanistan. Take care, enjoy...cause you never know. Peace.

A poem I wrote in the last couple of hours...

I sit here and type this with tears in my eyes,
the world is not right now, I just lost two guys.

Flying to rescue someone they'd save,
their helo just crashed, an H-60 PAVE.

The helo they flew in crashed to the ground,
leaving only "survivors", their loved ones, around.

One was experienced, the other still new,
they died in the service of both me and you.

They both knew the risks, we accept them like faith,
but once in awhile, death rears like a wraith.

Of one thing I'm certain, they died not in vain,
if it were two others, they'd both fly again.

And fly again, the rest of us will,
if for no other reason then to keep our minds still.

To get back on that horse and ride it away,
to reinforce why we wear the maroon beret.

We lost two brothers and though we are sad,
we'll celebrate their lives, the lives they had.

Lives by the motto, lives we will give,
These Things We Do, That Others May Live.

HOO YAH!!!

Remember.

From: Bob Holler [bobflies@mac.com]

Sent: Wednesday, March 26, 2003 8:00 AM

Subject: Coming Home

Not me. Not yet. I'm still in an "undisclosed location" hunkering down from the 57 knot winds all day. It snowed yesterday morning. Not a lot and nothing that stuck. Today, the winds. The tents are self destructing but overall we're doing okay. Back to the subject line. Please take the time to visit the following link. There's a great photo of our crew "coming home" from Afghanistan. Take care, enjoy. Peace.

Look for "OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM" and then for "SIX AIRMEN DIE IN AFGHANISTAN HELICOPTER CRASH." <http://www.af.mil/>

Bob

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FILE PHOTO -- An HH-60 Pave Hawk helicopter like the one seen here crashed in Afghanistan on March 23, killing all six airmen on board. The aircraft was on a mission to carry civilians to medical care when it crashed. (U.S. Air Force photo by Master Sgt. Val Gempis) | [High-res version of this photo](#)

Six airmen die in helicopter crash

by Jim Garamone
American Forces Press Service

03/24/03 - WASHINGTON (AFP) -- An Air Force HH-60G Pave Hawk helicopter crashed near Ghazni, Afghanistan, on March 23, killing all aboard, said Combined Joint Task Force 180 officials at Bagram Air Base.

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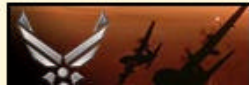
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Six airmen died in the crash, task force spokesman Army Col. Roger King said. Names of the dead are being withheld pending notification of next of kin. Enemy fire was not a factor in the crash, officials said.

The helicopter crew was on its way to evacuate two Afghan children for medical treatment in the U.S. facilities at Bagram, King said. One child has a head injury, the other an eye injury. Both children arrived safely in Bagram on March 24, he said.

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From: Bob Holler [bobflies@mac.com]

From: Pedro Morales [<mailto:pmorales@rgj.com>]
Sent: Wednesday, April 02, 2003 5:23 AM
To: robert.holler@azab.aorcentaf.af.mil
Subject: Reno Gazette-Journal Interview

Dear Sgt. Holler,
Your sister, Terri Scarpulla, has been kind enough to send me the emails you send to her and her coworkers. The writing is great. It's so descriptive you can almost feel the sand crawling up your nose. I know that she and her coworkers have sent care packages to you and your soldiers. She tells me that next week they plan to send more packages. I'm doing a story on what those packages mean to soldiers on the frontline. I hope you can take some time and answer the following questions.

How do the special packages help the morale amongst the soldiers?

Why is it important to receive a special care package?

I once spoke to a soldier who said that those troops who never receive packages from home often feel left out and dispirited. Is this true? Can you elaborate on this point?

Do you get tired of eating military food? How refreshing is it to have food sent to you from the U.S.?

How do the packages help you cope with the rough conditions of your current living situation?

Many people donated simply because they felt they needed to support our troops somehow. Do you feel supported by the American citizens? What would you like to say to those that sent you these packages?

Please feel free to add anything at all.

Thanks for your time. People here are looking forward to this story as we hope that it will prompt other residents to support troops by sending packages. Good luck to you and your troops!

Pedro Morales
Reporter
Reno Gazette-Journal

From: Bob Holler [bobflies@mac.com]

Sent: Wednesday, April 02, 2003 11:32 AM
To: 'pmorales@rgj.com'
Cc: Scarpulla.Terri
Subject: RE: Reno Gazette-Journal Interview

Pedro,
I've attached my answers to the original email. Please feel free to contact me if you have any further questions.

Bob

Dear Sgt. Holler,

Pedro,

First, let's get the salutations down. ☺ I am a Chief Master Sergeant in the Air Force. I go by Chief not Sgt.

Your sister, Terri Scarpulla, has been kind enough to send me the emails you send to her and her coworkers. The writing is great. It's so descriptive you can almost feel the sand crawling up your nose. I know that she and her coworkers have sent care packages to you and your soldiers.

Second, Air Force members are referred to as Airmen not soldiers.

She tells me that next week they plan to send more packages. I'm doing a story on what those packages mean to soldiers on the frontline. I hope you can take some time and answer the following questions.

How do the special packages help the morale amongst the soldiers?
First, packages let you know or reinforce that someone cares about you. With that thought in mind, morale is boosted because you lose that feeling of isolation, if only for a moment. Usually, when you receive a package it causes you to reflect on the person or people that sent it. The reflections are usually positive ones and affect you're mood and morale.

Why is it important to receive a special care package?
They're important for the reasons stated above. Additionally, care packages bring with them everyday items that one tends to take for granted. It's amazing how good a hot bowl of ramen noodles taste after you've been eating MRE's for a while. Or that tin of Copenhagen snuff, or chocolate, or anything that you don't have and can't get. The care packages cater to the cravings that everyone has. The difference is, we can't just go to the local 7-11 to fulfill those cravings. And most importantly, those letters, cards and pictures from loved ones are priceless. Care packages are our connection to the U.S. and our loved ones.

I once spoke to a soldier who said that those troops who never receive packages from home often feel left out and dispirited. Is this true?
Can you elaborate on this point?

From: Bob Holler [bobflies@mac.com]

If you look at the reasons care packages are important then you can surmise that not getting them would negatively affect your mood and morale. No one likes to be left out. No one likes to not be remembered, cared for or loved. The impact is even greater when an individual sees his friends or co-workers opening packages and he has none of his own. You actually get left out twice; first, because no one back home included you in their thoughts and second, you can't join in the fun of opening and sharing with your friends and co-workers. It's like Christmas day and you have no presents under the tree.

Do you get tired of eating military food? How refreshing is it to have food

sent to you from the U.S.?

Yes and it depends. Food from home, like stated above, fulfills those cravings that everyone has. It's a total package; you feel loved because someone cared enough to send you something and you love filling those personal cravings.

How do the packages help you cope with the rough conditions of your current

living situation?

They definitely make it better. I love to cook. I love to eat. We have what we call "sticky rice nights" here. I brought a Thai sticky rice bamboo steamer and steamer pot with me. Every once in awhile, I'll steam up a huge batch of sticky rice. When it's done we'll stand around a table and eat the rice dipped in a mixture of fish sauce, Thai peppers, soy sauce and lime juice. We all eat with our hands, bullshit and just savor the unique and different tastes. It's a wonderful thing.

Many people donated simply because they felt they needed to support our troops somehow. Do you feel supported by the American citizens? What would

you like to say to those that sent you these packages?

All of us feel supported for the most part by the American people. For those that have sent packages, my heartfelt thanks goes out to you. You have no idea what a package from home means to us over here.

Please feel free to add anything at all.

Just an additional story. This has nothing to do with packages per se but it's related. When I was in Afghanistan in December (I've been deployed since November), Outback Steakhouse sent their workers and steaks to Khandahar. They cooked real steak dinners for everyone there. What a meal it was and more importantly, what a gesture to those in harms way. Thanks Outback Steakhouse.

Story number two. There is a lady that lives in Florida who has gone above and beyond in her efforts to send packages to the troops. Her name is Ellen Harpin and she has a story to tell. You can reach her at ellenharpin@webtv.net She has a group of ladies that knit hats, socks, scarves etc for the troops. We have gotten no less than 15 boxes of her stuff since my departure in November. And, included in every box are candy bars, chap stick, raisins, munchies, etc. Her packages are always opened with anticipation. You really should drop her a line.

From: Bob Holler [bobflies@mac.com]

Thanks for your time. People here are looking forward to this story as we hope that it will prompt other residents to support troops by sending packages.
Good luck to you and your troops!

Pedro Morales
Reporter
Reno Gazette-Journal

From: Bob Holler [bobflies@mac.com]

Sent: Wednesday, April 16, 2003 9:07 AM

Subject: Back from "Down Range"

I'm back. Been gone for awhile without any email connectivity. I'll be sure and answer emails that came in while I was gone but just wanted to put one out letting everyone know I was okay. It's nice to be "at home" where I have my stuff, a bed and a relative lack of dust. Not to mention electricity, water, and food other than MRE's. Not to say that I didn't enjoy my trip "down range". I had a good time and it was actually very relaxing. A lot less to worry about when your focus is forced to only one thing because of lack of connectivity. I got some sun, got a lot of reading done and enjoyed time with the guys. A lot of talk about this all winding down. We're already sending people back home starting tomorrow. Don't know when I'll be heading back but I'm sure it will be soon. In the meantime, a lot to do to get packed and ready for re-deployment. This will not be my last email but just in case I forget, thanks to everyone for the support, emails, packages, thoughts and prayers. I appreciate each and everyone of you. One last hero picture from my recent trip. Take care of yourselves, keep smiling and above all, enjoy life. Peace.

Bob



From: Bob Holler [bobflies@mac.com]

Sent: Tuesday, April 22, 2003 12:20 PM
Subject: Flying in the face.....

Thought you all would enjoy this one. Taken somewhere inside Iraq.
Peace.

Bob



From: Bob Holler [bobflies@mac.com]



From: Bob Holler [bobflies@mac.com]

Sent: Thursday, April 24, 2003 11:14 AM
Subject: Down Range...

This will probably be my last short story while I'm here. I think we're pretty close to leaving. We're mostly packed and all anxious. I'd like to say thanks to everyone who wrote, sent stuff or maybe just said a silent prayer. Sanity is a matter of perspective and you all helped keep mine. Take care, keep smiling and above all, enjoy. Peace.

Bob

Downrange

It's a perfect night for night vision goggles (NVG's). It's crystal clear and the waxing, 7/8th moon combined with all the starlight is providing an illumination level of 88%. Not that you really need NVG's on a night like this but you can see the fighting when you wear them. Off in the distance you can see angry red tracer fire from anti aircraft artillery (AAA) positions arcing up into the sky, seeking out coalition airplanes that would do them harm. The brilliant but muted flash of bombs as they silence those same AAA positions. The dazzling streak of offensive rockets (ours), launching into the sky, on their way to targets unknown. Flashes, streaks, tracers, the occasional shooting star and even satellites whizzing across the sky are all visible when you view the world through the narrow, green tint of NVG's. As I sit here tonight though, inside our "compound," smoking a cigar and drinking a Guinness, I marvel at the fact that I'm actually sitting in the middle of the Iraqi desert watching the war. It's almost like TV except without the narrative. How did we end up here? As the war progressed it became clear that we needed to be "closer to the fight" to provide timely rescue coverage to those pilots who were at risk putting lead on target. We had several courses of action available to us and finally decided on an airstrip in the middle of nowhere. The airstrip is just that, an airstrip, period. Did I mention it was in the middle of nowhere? Originally built and used solely as a divert strip during the Iran-Iraq war for the dispersion of Iraqi warplanes, it has no infrastructure whatsoever. There are no buildings, no water, no electricity, no phones, no nothing. This particular airstrip was already occupied by a small contingent of Army and other folks and, as a result, was somewhat secure (if you call 90 Army types protecting a 13,000 foot runway out in the middle of nowhere secure). Once decided, we rolled into town and first-things-first, set up communications (SATCOM radios), a tent for an operations center and several pup tents for those of us who would stay longer than a 12-hour alert-shift. Force protection is obviously a big deal (after all we are in the middle of bad-guy territory) so we hooked up with some Army engineers and they dug/constructed a dirt berm for us around our area. To the berm we added an M-60 machinegun position. We have a mortar platoon just outside our berm to the north, a .50-caliber machine gun position to our southwest and roving patrols of Army types in armored HUMVEE's. Once the very basic infrastructure was in place, we started pulling alert from this downrange location in addition to the two other locations we were already working out of. And what is my role at this location? Management. Strictly management. I make sure my guys get a fair say in what's going on (both administratively and operationally), decide what risks we're willing to take as far as missions are concerned (mission management) and I basically run the camp. I make

From: Bob Holler [bobflies@mac.com]

sure there's enough food (MRE's) and water, the trash gets taken out, the portable generator stays gassed and running and that the shitter gets burned. I also ensure someone is monitoring the radio and mIRC Chat (a classified internet chat room) and that strict light discipline is followed during the hours of darkness. Overall, it's a real slow job, one with a lot of personal time. Time for reading, catching some rays and just wandering the field finding people you know and renewing old acquaintances and friendships. It's amazing whom you run across on these deployments and even more amazing, where you run into them. So, what's a typical day? Wake up around 0400Z. Do the health stuff, brush my teeth, wash my hair, take a baby-wipe bath and put sunscreen on. And of course, brew some espresso. When the espresso is done its time to sit down, relax and drink my espresso while eating an energy bar or some other such thing out of an MRE. Once breakfast is over its time to gather up all the trash and take it to the burn pit. By this time, those that are morning inclined, their morning constitutions over, it's time to burn the shitter. Burning the shitter brings back memories of Afghanistan. Every time I smelled diesel fuel after returning from that trip (like gassing up my truck), I thought about taking a shit. Weird. Let me digress a moment and say a word, or two, about our shitter. We built our shitter back here in the rear. It's a real nice plywood box with a no-shit (no pun intended) real toilet seat on it. The box is made to sit on top of a cut-down 55-gallon drum, which is buried in the ground. It's actually a real nice setup considering the environment and alternatives. I've personally seen guys from other units walk half a mile just so they can sit on a real seat while conducting their business. It's a bitch to find in the dark though without NVG's. Anyway, once a day, you pull the box-with-seat off the 55-gallon drum; fill the drum with diesel fuel and torch. It beats a toilet brush and that blue cleaning stuff. Once the shitter is ablaze (being careful to stay upwind) I load up one of our small trailers with boxes and boxes of donated food and "stuff". Once I'm loaded, I drive around the field giving away "stuff" to the soldiers that don't have any "stuff". Remember I said there was nothing here? There's no place to buy anything so, whenever we fly in (at least once a day to change out alert crews) we bring a whole bunch of donated "stuff" from our base in the rear. And the base wasn't bashful about donating "stuff" either. After the initial email to the base populace, we had four pickup truck loads of "stuff" the very first day and it's kept coming at a steady stream since. The majority of the "stuff" you guys sent me was donated to those without. Thanks. The soldiers go crazy when they see me each morning. They come out and look and pick and take and, I think, are just happy that someone cares enough to bring them "stuff". We're talking about soldiers that don't even have tents to sleep in. Most don't even have sleeping bags. The most popular items have been baby wipes, sunscreen, lotion and of-course, junk food. After my morning rounds of playing Santa Claus (imagine me being associated with Santa), I head back to the compound for some reading and sun providing the wind is not whipping up the desert at 40-50 knots (I'm not into being sandblasted). When the wind is up, this place is downright miserable. The pup tents fill up with an enormous amount of sand in only a couple of hours and there is no solace from the constant onslaught of the airborne sandpaper. However, today's a nice day, so time for a book, some sun and some much needed relaxation. Out here, everything is reduced to essentials. Life is simple out here. Even back in the rear, only a couple hundred miles away, things get more complicated because your focus widens in direct proportion to

From: Bob Holler [bobflies@mac.com]

the distance you are from the war. But for now, the essentials, a good book, a good cigar and a nice hot day to just sit around and relax in. The only other scheduled thing to do is meet the next plane when it arrives to help change out the alert crews and equipment. A short drive, on NVG's, from the compound to the runway, pick up more "stuff", the next alert crew and their equipment, get them settled down for their 12-hour alert shift and then its time to settle down to a cigar, a beer and another night of NVG TV. It doesn't get any simpler than this. Take care. Peace.

Bob



From: Bob Holler [bobflies@mac.com]

Sent: Monday, April 28, 2003 10:01 AM

Subject: Thanks

To everyone at IGT...YOU ROCK!!!! I just returned from a two-day trip and waiting for me upon my return was not one, not two, not three, but four, count em, four boxes of "STUFF". The box with the soccer balls in it was especially fun. It was all I could do to get the "kids" to stop playing ball in the tent. But really, the thoughts, emails and "STUFF" are all greatly appreciated by me and the guys. You all have gone above and beyond and will be remembered. Thanks again. Once again, take care, keep smiling and above all, enjoy. Peace.

Bob