

The Past, The Present and the Future

October 22, 2004

Family and Friends,

I write you once again with my latest update from Iraq. As my friends, you have most likely recognized by now that you have become the target of my outlet: writing. It has become more so as I wrap up my book which I hope to publish. At this point it is ready to submit to a publisher (in case any of you have any contacts with publishers please let me know). I never really recognized writing as an outlet for me, but then again I never really pictured myself getting sent to war either. By now an email from me to you about once a month has become somewhat predictable. Life here has been anything but...

In some ways I consider myself extremely unlucky to have our unit quite possibly extended for a longer tour. In other ways I feel extremely blessed. Perhaps the greatest blessing is having the opportunity to care for and associate with the soldiers who are the true heroes of this war. I have been lucky in other ways as well. After dining several times at the "Green Zone Cafe" the cafe as destroyed by a suicide bomber THE DAY AFTER I left the green zone! Some of my friends joke that I am not the most punctual person at times but this timing could not have been better!

On the 14th of October I was told to move out of my room for the arrival of the 10th Mountain Division Army unit as we prepare to move elsewhere. I thought I would be a lot happier seeing this unit arrive. However, the arrival of our "replacement" unit does not mean we are going home anytime soon. I grumbled as I moved all my items to another room. I find moving to be an annoying task and mumbled the whole time as I made multiple trips lugging my belongings. It took all day. I was in a bitter mood. This had been my room from February until October 14th. On the 15th of October a mortar round landed IN MY OLD ROOM! My cot I slept in just one day earlier now lay in rubble and shattered glass. With another example of my stellar punctuality, suddenly my bitter mood changed!

A couple of days ago I was convoying in an armored humvee in the streets of Baghdad returning to our post. Suddenly we arrived to a standstill traffic jam. The streets were crowded. All cars were stopped. Apparently, there was news of an unexploded car bomb up ahead. Instead of turning around and taking another route (which seemed the most logical solution to me), we were radioed by the base and told to "hold security" around the bomb. Yes, "hold security!" The crowds flooded the streets. The Iraqi police sirens screamed around us. And we stood like sitting ducks around our humvees in the vicinity of an unexploded car bomb with our weapons "holding security." As the doctor what I was securing I don't exactly know, but nonetheless I was "holding security." Don't ask-just execute! What ended up detonating was a harmless smoke grenade. Luckily nothing exploded. Once again, I breathe a sigh of relief. Yes, it could be worse.

Now we stare in the face of yet another challenge. Now approaching our 11th month, we find ourselves possibly traveling to secure yet another city in our grand tour of Iraq. A city that you will definitely hear about as the Iraqi elections approach. This will most likely mean living out of our vehicles once again like we did in Najaf. We are told mail will not be delivered to us if postmarked after the 15th of November. Quite possibly we will have no internet. None of this is certain yet. Like I mentioned in my last email to you our destiny is as clear as mud. However, this appears to be our future.

Let's shift gears from our future to our past. For a change in pace, I thought I would write more about the history of the unit for which I am the doctor. From what we are told, we are the "heaviest" Brigade in Iraq at this time in terms of armor and weaponry. The Battalion I am the sole doctor for (1st Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division) included greats such as Robert E. Lee and has fought alongside General Custer and General MacArthur. It has played critical roles in the Civil War, World War, Korean War, Vietnam, etc. This Battalion has earned unit citations from the President of the United States. History repeats itself, and one day Baghdad, Najaf, and our next locations will be added to the unit history. I was never really a history buff, but I found the excerpt that I have attached below interesting. Sometimes I wonder what it must have been like to experience the other adventures encountered by this Battalion. I wonder if their doctor felt the same way I do. Maybe their doctor had a group of good friends like you guys to write letters to!

5th Cavalry Regimental History

The 5th Cavalry Regiment was organized on 03 March 1855 as the 2nd United States Cavalry Regiment at Louisville, Kentucky with officers and troopers from Alabama, Maryland, Missouri, Indiana, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, Ohio and Virginia. In September of that same year, the Regiment relocated to Texas. Two years later, LTC Robert E. Lee took command and the Regiment spent four years fighting 13 campaigns against Native American tribes of the American Southwest. In March of 1861, the Regiment moved from Texas to Carlisle, Pennsylvania where the officers and men loyal to the South left the Regiment to serve in the Confederacy. The Regiment was refitted with new troopers and officers, organized under the Army of the Potomac, and fought its first battle of the Civil War at Bull-Run. On 10 August 1861, the 2nd U.S. Cavalry Regiment was re-designated as the 5th U.S. Cavalry Regiment, and went on to fight with distinction in more than 17 campaigns at places like Gaine's Mill, Fairfax Courthouse, Falling Waters, Martinsburg, the Wilderness, Shenandoah Valley, and Appomattox. It was at Gaine's Mill on 27 June 1862, that the regiment made a valiant charge and stopped the advance of a Confederate Division commanded by General John Bell Hood, saving the Artillery of the Army of the Potomac from annihilation.

In September 1868, the regiment received orders to prepare for duty against hostile Indians in Kansas and Nebraska. For several years the 5th Cavalry fought many skirmishes and battles with the Sioux, Cheyenne, Arapaho and Apache Indians. After General Custer and 264 of his men of the 7th Cavalry perished at Little Big Horn, troopers of the 5th Cavalry Regiment rode after the Sioux to avenge their deaths. In 1898, the regiment traveled from San Antonio to the embarkation port of Tampa, Florida to enter the Spanish American War. More than 17,000 troops, including the 5th Cavalry, landed on the southwest coast of Puerto Rico. In 1901, a bloody insurrection broke out on the distant islands of the Philippines. Dismounted, they battled in the jungles of the Pacific to end the Moro Insurrection. In 1913, border threats to the United States brought the regiment back to the deserts of the Southwest. In 1916, the regiment was dispatched to the Mexican border to serve as part of the Mexican Punitive Expedition. Under "BlackJack" Pershing, the 5th Regiment crossed the Rio Grande into Mexico and was successful in stopping the border raids conducted by bandits of Pancho Villa and eliminating the national threat from the Southwest.

On 7 December 1941, the Japanese attacked the American fleet at Pearl Harbor. In February 1943, the 5th Cavalry Regiment was alerted for an overseas assignment. Soldiers of the 5th Cavalry Regiment dismounted and moved to the Southwest Pacific Theater. Over the next year and a half, the Regiment distinguished itself in some of the most desperate and bloody battles of the Second World War. The 5th Cavalry battled ashore with General Douglas MacArthur to liberate the Philippine Islands during the invasions of Leyte and Luzon. During the battle for Luzon, troopers from the 5th Cavalry Regiment were among the first soldiers to enter and free the Philippine Capital of Manila.

The Korean War began shortly before dawn on 25 June 1950 and the 5th Cavalry was among the first to deploy to the Korean battlefield. The Regiment was thrown into the desperate battle around the South Korean port city of Pusan. Troopers of 5th Cav held their portions of the perimeter around Pusan for more than 50 days against overwhelming numbers of enemy forces. At one time they defended against more than five North Korean Divisions. Later, during the drive north, the 5th Cavalry Regiment was the first unit to enter and occupy the North Korean capital of Pyongyang. On 1 July 1965, the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) was officially activated for combat duty in the Republic of Vietnam. In the Oriental calendar year of the "Horse", 5th Cavalry Regiment soldiers had returned to war wearing the famous and feared patch of the First Cavalry Division. The newly arrived Sky troopers wasted little time in getting into action, going into battle on 18 September 1965. Fifth Cavalry troopers found themselves fighting against Viet Cong guerillas and determined North Vietnamese regulars for almost 8 years and 16 campaigns. As a result of its gallant actions, the Regiment was awarded two presidential Unit Citations and the Valorous Unit Citation.

In August 1990 the BLACK KNIGHTS were alerted for deployment to Southwest Asia in support of Operation Desert Shield. On 24 February 1991 the ground war began and the BLACK KNIGHTS found themselves fighting in the greatest mechanized battle since the Second World War. The Black Knights along with the rest of the 1st Cavalry Division conducted a successful "feint" which froze four Iraqi divisions, allowing the VII Corps to envelop the Iraqi forces from the west virtually unopposed.