

Dad-

Sorry I don't write very often, however, as slow as the Internet is here I do not have the time to wait in-line or wait on-line for it.

The past month was a terrible month for me and Hammer Company. Surprisingly the enemy has aroused its head and the fighting has increased much more so than it ever was in Iraq. "Troops in Contact" and IEDs were daily occurrences; resupply for full combat loads of ammo was routine. The firefights here usually last from 30 minutes to sometimes as long as 2 hours.

It all started with the loss of one of HHC's snipers, SGT Durgin. We run into the enemy daily around the Korengal River Valley and the Pech River Valley. It is almost a game. They fire at us, we fire back at them, and call for fire on their location because they are usually to high up the mountain to assault. This happens daily and only by the grace of God we had never gotten hit....until we lost SGT Durgin.

SGT Durgin died in a firefight when he stayed behind in order to allow the rest of his team to break contact after running into the enemy. It took several shots for the enemy to bring down SGT Durgin as he returned fire to draw the enemy's attention away from his team. SGT Durgin was an incredible soldier. The kind of guy that always had a smile on his face and was making jokes all the time. I had the privilege of being in B Co with him in Iraq.

At the time CPT McKnight was in charge of Durgin's Company and I know it was a challenging time for him, as I later learned from my own experience.

For SGT Durgin's funeral they pulled the HHC Commander, CPT Evans, and 1SG Speedie, as well as Lt. Niven and the Scout PSG to Bagram. As a result I took charge of the 7 platoons on the Pech, as the acting HHC Commander. It was during this time that we were hit the hardest. The enemy made numerous attacks and ambushes on us using IED's, RPG's, Machine Gun Fire, and small arms. These attacks were the largest that we have seen since we got here.

Previously, I was ambushed while walking through some of the villages when I was tasked with leading a search party for a missing item. However I have never seen volumes of fire like this before. Soldiers were firing all their ammo and AT4s, the modern day Bazooka, defending their patrol bases or responding to ambushes. Remember, unlike Iraq, these soldiers have yet to sleep in a building. Fortunately, we faired well through the sleepless nights and had no more casualties, until Lt Ewens and SGT Sanchez.

As for LT Ewens and SGT Sanchez, they left from my patrol base to go on a patrol and got ambushed with IED and small arms. I should have gone on the patrol with them, but stayed back. Seconds after the IED went off, just a few hundred meters away, we responded to provide cover and care for the wounded. We fought the enemy for a while but it was already over for 3 of the soldiers.

All three men I knew personally, and believe them to be outstanding men. Especially the two that died. Lt Ewens was the nicest guy, great sense of humor and sort of looked like Jimmy Baur. SGT Sanchez had a terrific sense of humor as well. He was an Irish/Hispanic from Brooklyn with a thick accent and a huge smile. They were both the sort of guys that led from the front, loke a real leader. And in the end, that is what got them.

Anyway, that one long day & night led to others. By the time I came back from the IED causality incident Woody, my old gunner in Iraq in A Co, had been shot in the leg, as was another soldier from my old platoon in A Co. LT Preston, one of my favorite LTs, and now Platoon Leader for my old Platoon in A Co, was shot in the arm. However, he did not leave the fight and is still out in the mountains with a hole in his arm leading 1st platoon in combat. Just a few days ago one of the 1st PLT, A Co soldiers (19 year old Pfc. Davis of Lt Preston's Platoon) was killed by mortars during an attack.

To say the least, I was glad when CPT Evans got back from Bagram.

My old RTO, SPC (now SGT) Lybert was killed in a firefight fighting between 40-60 Taliban. Three other soldiers died with him. He was serving with our sister battalion just north of where I am. Also I come to find out that one of my best friends in country, CPT Damon, from the Chamberlin Engineers of the Maine National Guard, died of a heart attack. We lived and worked together here at Asadabab and he came out with me on my re-supply patrols. He was another guy that I could sit and listen to for hours, he

had so much knowledge of history and politics and reminded me of Matt West.

Also, there were many Afghans that died during these days, some where people that just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, some were policemen trying to assist the coalition and others were Taliban that didn't get away with their clever schemes.

Also CPT McKnight was medivac-ed to Bagram after falling down a mountain. Please pray for his recovery, he is facing possible spinal damage, damaged kidneys and a broken pelvis.

Fortunately, I was at Bagram at the end of the month so that I could see 5 of the fallen comrades loaded on the bird home as well as visit in the hospital one of the soldiers I was with when Lt. Ewens and SGT Sanchez died. Unfortunately, there is more that I want to say but I can't, maybe sometime just between us.

Please be careful who reads this because I don't want to scare Mom or Kirsten with my stories.

My goal is that you and others understand the sacrifices that are being made out here. You can't see the dirtied soldiers that have slept, eaten, and lived in combat. For them every night is MRE cruddy meals, OP shifts, dirt pillows, and fear. They have been hiking mountains much taller than Camelback daily, with over 100lbs of gear on. They can count on one hand how many times they have used a shower and toilet since last March. They have learned Pashtu as a means to get information, food, and entertainment from the locals. They are hardly recognizable as the men that left Ft. Drum, most of them have lost between 20-30 lbs, their once new ACUs are now hanging shreds of brown cloth on their bodies. These men are sacrificing much.

Lt. Ewens leaves his bride behind, SGT Sanchez leaves his bride and two daughters, SGT Durgin and SGT Lybert leave their fiancée's, and they all left dreams for a better future.

Anyhow, make sure the people back home know what their country and soldiers are doing for Afghanistan during this 4th of July. I hope that you have a great weekend.

God Bless You,

God Bless Afghanistan,

God Bless America,

And God Forgive Us All.

-Boots