

Thanksgiving in Uniform

Marine tells what he misses while in Iraq

By EVE HIGHTOWER
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Lifelong Yolo County resident Lt. Col. Charlie Schaupp has been in Fallujah for seven months. Where rockets and mortars fall from the sky, Schaupp dreams of what used to be chores: mowing his lawn in Esparto, grocery shopping, barbecuing.

In an e-mail interview last week, Schaupp, who has been in the Marine Corps and Reserve for 23 years, explained what it is like to be half a world away from his fiancée, work more than seven months without a day off and watch troops fresh from battle receive gifts from home as we approach Thanksgiving.

DD: How long have you been in Fallujah, Iraq?

CS: I was assigned Operation Iraqi Freedom II as a command staff member last March. I arrived at Fallujah, First Marine Expeditionary

How to Help the Troops:

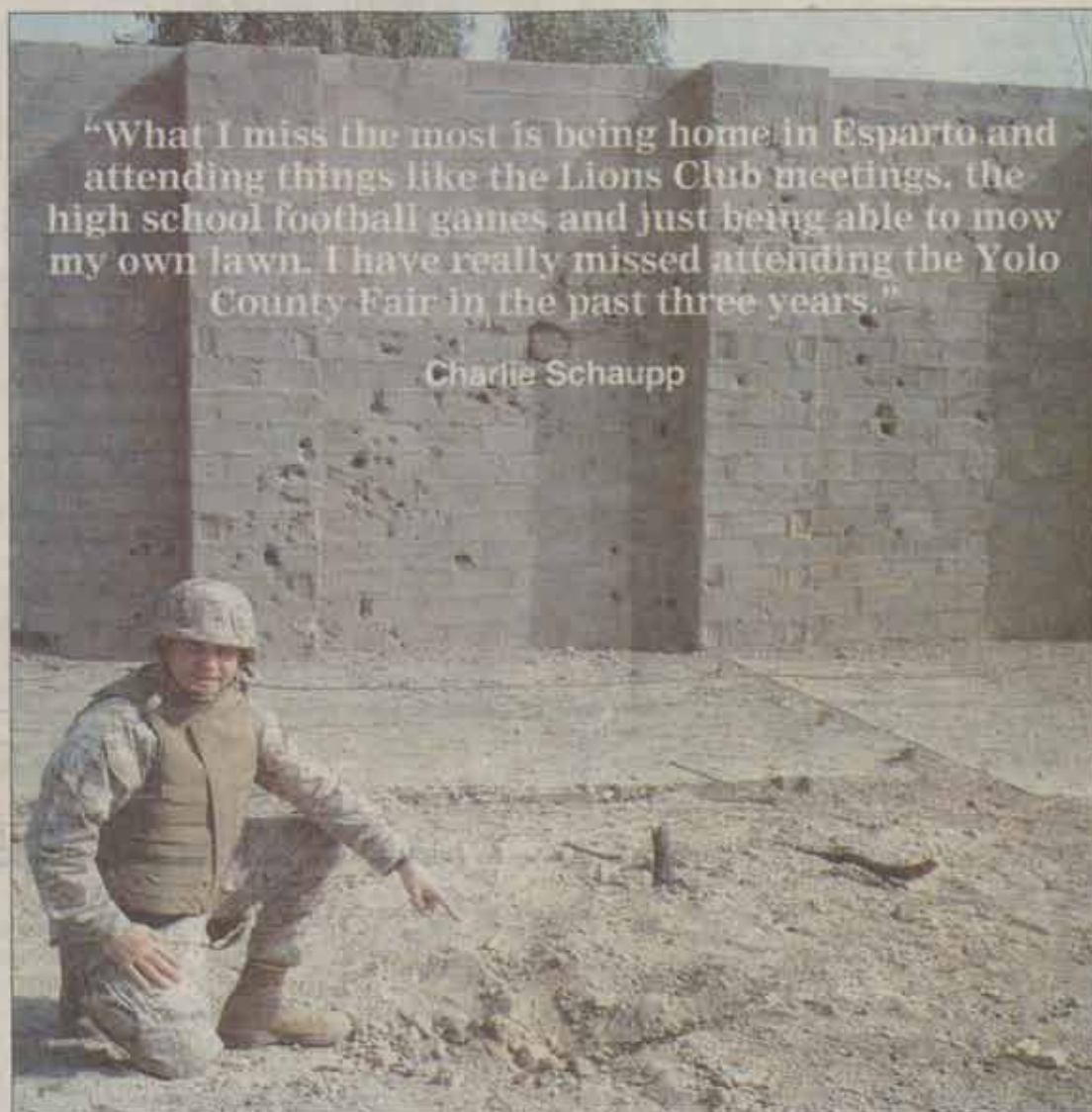
For more information about how you can send gifts to troops in Iraq, contact The Christian Church, Disciples of Christ, at 662-9356.

Headquarters located on the outskirts of the city of Fallujah, last April. I have been at the Fallujah Command Headquarters

for about seven months. I am also in my third year of active duty after being mobilized in January 2002.

DD: What is your job in Iraq?

CS: I am a Special Staff Officer to the Commanding General of the First Marine Expeditionary Force. I am assigned as the Security Officer and I coordinate security and sensitive information between the Intelligence Section and the Operations Section and other key sections as required. These duties mostly pertain to ensuring classified information is safeguarded and only personnel with the need to know



Lt. Col. Charles Schaupp of Esparto points to an impact crater made by a 122mm rocket which flew over his head. Shrapnel from the blast made the holes in the wall. Schaupp said this is the sixth rocket to land in his area. Fortunately, no one was hurt.

and the proper security access level are given access to classified information. I also work with the Force Protection & Anti-Terrorism Section to protect the security of the command headquarters. I see the general daily, but most of my work is through the chief of staff and the various other key staff sections on security issues.

DD: What do you do on an average day in Iraq?

CS: I work security issues and security clearances to ensure only personnel with a need to know see classified information. This includes a myriad of daily tasks and briefings.

Because I am 49 years old and still in the Marines, I also try to get several hours of Physical Training (PT) daily. Usually, I run three miles. Due to the current operations, I had to curtail my PT secessions. But you might say I am still young because the generals, who are well into their 50s, also PT everyday. It is just part of being a marine. I have been out running when we have had mortar attacks. Luckily, they never hit in my immediate area.

DD: How much sleep have you gotten since you arrived in Fallujah?

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CS: I usually try to sleep between 2 a.m. and 6 a.m. daily (Iraq time) sometimes more, sometimes less. The command operates 24-hour combat operations, seven days a week. During the daily light, I work a lot of coordination issues within the command. In the evenings (when it is midday in Washington and Camp Pendleton), I spend a lot of my time in communication with my counterparts in the United States working a myriad of security issues.

DD: What do you eat over there? How many meals do you eat a day? Are you able to buy food and supplies there? How much does a can of soda cost?

CS: We are provided with three meals a day. Currently, on an average, one or two of the meals are MREs due to the current tactical situation, but Kellogg, Brown & Root operates a chow hall that is open in the evenings for a hot, fresh cooked meal.

Many of our combat forces take advantage of the evening meal and they rotate marines in from combat operations for a hot meal and shower as much as possible. We have showers and toilets set up for them as well as a phone center and Internet service, so they can contact their families. We also have a laundry service for their laundry bags.

The Military Exchange System operates a small tactical PX here with an assortment of soft drinks, toiletries supplies and snack foods. The soda price in the PX is about the same as in the U.S.A., but the selection is usually limited because we never know what will be coming in on the supply convoy. They also carry some DVDs and CDs and many of the troops have purchased small portable DVD players.

We also receive a lot of donations of snacks and DVDs in the mail. I have received numerous boxes sent to me to distribute to the marines by the Woodland Christian Church and Woodland's Hollywood Video.

The marines just love it when we have mail call because it almost always means a new assortment of DVDs and good things to eat from the folks back home. Other Yoloans like the DeKnikker, Hayes and Robertson families, to name just a few, have sent many boxes. That is some of what I receive. Almost every marine has received donations from home. The boxes contain everything from socks and foot-powder, to batteries, to jerky (always a big hit), to just-released DVDs.

One of your home-town heroes, Mayor and Marine Staff Sergeant Matt Rexroad, has been doing a lot of coordination for donations. Not only did he serve here, he continues to support us by getting people in touch with marines who are deployed over here.

DD: How do you get news there? What do you think of the media's coverage of the war and what is happening in Fallujah?

CS: We get our news mostly on T.V. Satellite feeds. Normally, the chow halls show Fox News or CNN on large TVs. Many marines log on to the Internet to see what is happening. Almost everyday I log onto the Daily Democrat's Web page to see what is happening at home.

The media coverage has been very good. We have imbedded reporters assigned to many of our units and see them daily in and about the troop areas.

The most popular is Ollie North. As a retired Lieutenant Colonel the troops really respect him. The saying "Once a marine, always a marine" really applies to Ollie North. But we admire most all of the reporters here. They eat the same food as the marines and live in the field with the marines. Each unit that has an imbedded tends to adopt them as one of their own and treats him or her as part of their team.

DD: Have you received live fire? How did you respond?

CS: We receive random, indirect fire. Mostly 122mm rockets and mortars. The amount is always random. You never know when they will attack. My phrase for the insurgents' tactics is: Hit-and-run for their lives. The moment they launch an attack, our counter battery units triangulate their position and return fire. Two days ago several 122mm rockets came in, but did not hit anything important. The day before that, it was a mortar attack, but all the mortars were duds and just stuck in the ground. I think the insurgents do not know how to properly store ordinance, which is

causing a lot of duds. (That is a good thing.) Usually, they do very little damage and we are hunkered in pretty well. Occasionally, they will hit something; marines have been wounded or killed.

A few months back, a fellow officer was killed by a rocket that hit about 40 meters from my position. For the most part, these random attacks are just a nuisance and we are not intimidated by them.

Last summer, the insurgents hit an ammunition dump of captured Iraqi ordinance with a mortar round. The ordinance was scheduled for destruction. The dump blew sky-high. We got on the roof to watch until ordinance start whizzing over our heads. So we got down and took cover.

There have also been a few attacks by suicide bombers in our perimeter and other areas where we lost marines. We have had a few ground attack warnings, but these have always been repulsed. Improvised Explosive Devices, roadside or vehicle bombs, have been used against a number of our convoys. But, from what I can tell, the insurgents rarely stand and fight. They just use hit-and-run terror tactics.

DD: What sort of contact have you had with Iraqis outside of combat zones?

CS: Most of my dealing with Iraqis has been working security issues with our Civil Affairs Group. The Civil Affairs Group is trying to work with Iraqi business people and community leaders to help them start to rebuild their country and establish free enterprise. The Civil Affairs Group is also working to repair the infrastructure of the Iraqi cities and rebuild or repair schools, hospitals and other important support facilities.

DD: What do you miss most about your daily life in the U.S.?

CS: What I miss the most is being home in Esparto and attending things like the Lions Club meetings, the high school football games and just being able to mow my own lawn. I have really missed attending the Yolo County Fair in the past three years. The Yolo County Fair, bar none, is the best county fair in Northern California. It is were you see all your long-time friends.

Being from Esparto, I also miss the Almond Festival and the Lions Club annual crab feed. Those events are always a lot of fun.

I also miss working with the Yolo County Boy Scouts. I always like attending their spring Camporee as a volunteer Scouter. I have not been able to attend in over three years. Sometimes, I just miss being able to go to a store, buy food and cook for myself. I love to barbecue and cook. It has been a while since I have been able to do some of the things I too often took for granted when I was home.

DD: When will you be home?

CS: I am due home in December for a visit over the Christmas Holidays. I have been granted two weeks leave. I will be rejoining my wife, Kwangja, on an 11-day Caribbean cruise, which I am really looking forward to. I have spent most of the year in Iraq. I have not had a day off in over seven months. It will be nice to have a vacation.

After the holidays, I report back to Okinawa, Japan, to complete my current tour of duty. Kwangja and I were married in Seoul last Christmas, so it will be good to spend our first anniversary with family.

DD: What will you take from your experience in Iraq?

CS: The thing that has made the biggest impression on me is the courage, determination and guts of these young men and women in the Marine Corps and Army. Although most of them are only one or two years out of high school, they have courageously faced an enemy who tries to use terror and intimidation. They are not at all intimidated by the attacks or attempts to instill fear. The leadership shown by our young noncommissioned officers in leading their troops against a ruthless adversary has been awe-inspiring and made me proud to be an American.

My experience here has reminded me to cherish the little joys of life like a trip to the store, a day with family, a visit with friends or just being able to mow my own lawn.

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