

Chaplain (Captain) Stanton Trotter reports from Iraq

The following e-mail report from Chaplain (Captain) Stanton Trotter with the 82nd Forward Support Battalion, 82nd Airborne Division was sent on April 23, 2007. Here's is a wonderful way to learn what our chaplains do with their time and how they minister. Telling their stories is something I encourage all of them to do. You will thoroughly enjoy what Stanton has to share.

Greetings Family, Friends, and Supporters,

Please excuse the formalness of this email, but I wanted to offer some thoughts and reflections and share them with ALL of you. So here goes. First, thank you to all of you that have sent me personal items and items in bulk to share with my soldiers. I really appreciate it personally and your gifts have helped me in my ministry. It is with great joy that I am able to share snacks and candy with my soldiers. Having these items in my office helps bring soldiers by to see me and this has opened the door to countless encounters where I am able to share hope, love, encouragement and the Gospel of Jesus Christ to many soldiers. So thank you for helping further the Kingdom of God.

Half-way mark We arrived into country at the beginning of August 06. This means that as of right now, March 22, 2007, we should be well over the half-way mark. However, rather than coming home in August 07, it is very likely that we will be extended by 90 days and come home November 07. As you can imagine, this has caused some emotional turmoil with my soldiers and with me personally. I understand why this has to happen, but understanding why only makes the separation a little bit easier. It will be tough but with God's help we will persevere.

Ministry Every day over here is a day of ministry. I am always the chaplain and find that my soldiers will talk with me anywhere and anytime. And I am always glad to provide a timely listening ear, encouraging word, prayer, and advice whenever soldiers are in need.

Sundays I co-pastor two different church services with another chaplain. The first service is a contemporary service and the second one is a traditional service. I really enjoy my Sundays and look forward to leading soldiers in worship.

Another big area of ministry for me is getting to pray with my soldiers right before they head out on a mission. My soldiers regularly go out on missions, but before they leave they always gather together for a briefing. At the end of the briefing, I step up and lead them in a time of prayer. It is wonderful time with my soldiers and clearly the highlight of my day. The soldiers are hungry for this prayer. In fact, many times soldiers ask me to come to their vehicle with them and offer another prayer for them personally or for their team. It is wonderful to see so many soldiers wanting God to be a part of their life.

Family Most of you know that I am a happily married man and a very proud father. Lauri and I have been married for 17 years, and we are blessed with two wonderful girls. Sierra is now a little over 2 years old. And Hannah, who was born during this deployment, is almost 5 months old. Being away from all of my girls is definitely tough. But I have made a few DVD movies of myself that they watch from time to time. And then Lauri makes some DVD movies of all of them and sends them to me. So we get to see each other in this way.

Loss of Life/Memorials This is my third combat tour as a chaplain (plus one as an enlisted soldier too), so I am not a stranger to the tragedy of war. Up until this point, my unit has not suffered any loss of life. By I cannot say the same for my brigade (parent unit). Our brigade has suffered multiple losses, and I had a first-hand encounter with the most recent loss. One of my fellow battalion chaplains was on R&R leave so I was covering down on his soldiers and providing chaplain coverage. His unit is on another base so that meant that I was living there with his soldiers.

During my time (10 days total) with that battalion, a road-side bomb killed six soldiers. All of this happened on one day in one event. I provided pastoral care to the soldiers of that battalion and then conducted a memorial ceremony for the six. As I listened to the soldiers and helped them grieve the loss of their buddies, I had many memories flood my mind. I have conducted too many memorials as a chaplain. I thought of my time in Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003) and remembered all of the soldiers that I have lost and conducted memorial ceremonies for. That was a tough week for me.

When people talk about the cost of freedom and the life that our soldiers are called to live, I know all about it, first-hand.

Running As I have shared with many of you, running is my saving grace during this deployment. I know it is strange to many of you, but running is something I really enjoy. So I have poured myself into a very stringent running regiment. My goal is to run a Boston qualifying marathon in December 2007 and then run the Boston marathon in April 2008.

Most days I am up early in the morning and running. I find myself in a wonderful zone while out there in the mornings running for miles and miles. It is my alone time as well as time with God. Most of my weekly sermons are meditated and prayed out during my really long runs. So what is a long run you may be asking? A long run is anything over 10 miles. I try to mix up my running throughout the week and then complete one really long run on Saturdays. And since some of you are probably wondering, here is what a typical week of running looks like for me.

Monday – 9 miles; Tuesday – Biking and weight lifting; Wednesday – 11 miles; Thursday – 6.2 miles (10 K); Friday – Biking and weight lifting; Saturday – 16 Miles; Sunday – Rest

What to send I feel funny about writing this section, but so many people ask what they can send to me personally and for my soldiers. So here are some suggestions. But please do not think that I am begging for you to send us anything.

First, I would ask all of you to pray for my soldiers and me. That is what we need the most. And if you get us on your church's prayer list, please send us a copy of it. Soldiers love to see church bulletins (or similar items) that list us as being prayed for.

Me personally, I love trail mix (all natural, no chocolate), Cliff bars (all flavors), all natural oatmeal, Kashi bars (variety of kinds and flavors), Balance Bars, Power Bars or Power Gels (this is my fuel for all of my running). Also, I could always use a good spiritual/theology/Bible based book.

My soldiers, they love all kinds of candy and cookies. I realize it is getting warmer each day so soon you will not be able to send chocolate, but my soldiers really love chocolate. The best item

is Peanut M&M's. They love them. Also, one community sent us 50 boxes of Girls Scout cookies. My soldiers really enjoyed these too. Anything to munch on is great.

Posters/letters/drawings/cards – I have wall space that is crying out to be filled with inspirational items from you. My goal is to have every inch of my walls covered before I leave. I love to put up posters or drawings that children have made for us. But it does not have to be just from children. Be creative. Send it to me, and I will proudly display it on my walls. Soldiers love to come in to my office and see all of the love and support on my walls. It brightens their day, and it brightens my day too.

Final Remarks Thank you again for all of your prayers and support. Even though this is form letter, please know that I appreciate each and every one of you. When this war is all over and you are telling stories about it, make sure to include that you had a hand in supporting this war effort. You did this by loving and supporting me and my soldiers. Thank you and may God bless you.

Chaplain Stanton Trotter

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