

THE DAILY EASTERN NEWS ONLINE

"Tell the truth and don't be afraid."

Thursday, August 25, 2005

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'Because they are soldiers'

By *Spc. David Fitzgerald/ 2003 Eastern graduate*

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Dear EIU students,

As an alumnus of Eastern and a former member of the broadcasting team, I feel somewhat obligated to provide information to the university that could have some bearing on the student body's opinion on global issues. My name is Spc. David Fitzgerald of the 864th Engineering Battalion, C Company based out of Ft. Richardson, Alaska. I am currently deployed to Afghanistan as part of Operation Enduring Freedom. I am one of many soldiers of the U.S. Army on deployment who endure hardships every day to provide some kind of relief to innocent and helpless people. I can tell you that this is a truly difficult and high stress occupation. My purpose in writing to the students at EIU is to provide an understanding of what the army is here for and why we as soldiers are here. Secondly, this is a plea for support.



C co 864th is a heavy combat support unit. This means that we go to dangerous areas in the world, and provide support for our combat soldiers and the local region's people through building and development. My unit's mission in Afghanistan is to build a road about 80 miles long between the cities of Kandahar and Tarin Kaot. This will improve transportation through this region significantly. The existing road before construction was nothing more than tire tracks over a goat trail where trucks would occasionally attempt to navigate almost impossible terrain to ship supplies. Now that the mission is almost complete, the trip between these two cities has reduced from a 12-hour trip only manageable by humvee to a three-hour trip easily commutable by bus to big rig. Sometimes the troops feel like this is a great accomplishment, especially because we are working in a region with a high Taliban threat. Despite enemy contact causing wounded engineers and dead soldiers, we continue to perform our tasks efficiently so we can achieve our goal to finish construction on time. The Taliban have not lightened their attack even though this road benefits the country on a whole and even in some way benefits the Taliban themselves.

Soldiers carry on and endure because they are soldiers. They are soldiers of the greatest nation on Earth. They made a choice to enlist for their own reasons;

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whether it was for financial or educational reasons, to establish security and safety for their families, or simply out of a strong sense of patriotism. Ultimately, every soldier is a soldier because they recognize the freedoms they have, and feel obligated to in some way return the favor. The biggest hardship that deployed soldiers endure is knowing that the country that they work and fight to defend, doesn't support them.

The troops out here do their jobs without question or hesitation, yet the low morale weakens them. Most soldiers occasionally hear reassuring words in letters or phone calls from their families at home. What is increasingly disheartening is that the general consensus of Americans in the states is less than supportive. Word of the media reporting the negative responses to troops in Afghanistan and Iraq has reached our ears. When soldiers hear Americans badmouthing our cause and purpose for occupying this area, it makes them feel as if the soldiers we have lost have died in vain, and that all of the work they are doing out here is for nothing. Our only reconciliation comes from our own hearts and minds.

Right now, my wife is just about ready to have my second child. I will miss that birth. My daughter is only two and a half years old. I have missed more than half of her life. I have missed almost half of my marriage. If my sacrifices are in vain, then what kind of father or husband does that make me? I am not alone out here. Many of my fellow soldiers go through the same thing. Nevertheless, we strive to make our families and our country proud of us, and to give them a reason to be proud to be an American.

I hope that by informing the students that soldiers at war are not necessarily ironclad in their morale, that this could make some kind of difference, however small. There are a lot of soldiers without support from their families at home. They receive no mail while others open packages from wives and husbands like it is Christmas. I hope that they can also get some kind of gratification for their sacrifices. The Americans back home are as much in this as we are, because it is through their support that we maintain resilience. There is an excellent organization called Any Soldier that can be found at anysoldier.com. This organization reaches out to the public to offer soldiers in need of a helping hand. My unit's address is listed below, and can be used to provide specific support to them. This letter is a plea for support, and as an alumnus of EIU, I know the warmth and compassion that the student body is capable of having. Thank you for your support.

ONLINE POLL

This week we ask our readers what is the worst part about the first week of school?

The moving-in process.
Stepping foot in the classroom again.
Dealing with all the drunk people.
Nothing, the first week of school is the easiest.

VOTE

RESULTS

See the results on page two of Friday's edition.

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