

My trip to Iraq with Chuck Norris **(“From the frontlines of Fallujah and our future”)** **By Pastor Todd DuBord**

Well, that was easily the most amazing trip I’ve ever taken in my life! For those who might not know, I’ve just returned from a week-long trip of visiting 17 military bases abroad (15 in Iraq) with Chuck Norris—who of course needs no explanation. (Chuck and his wife Gena--a 4th generation Chester resident--have attended the Church the past several years when they are here).

The best way I can describe the trip is through a series of adjectives. It was the most awesome, incredible, inspiring, scary, surreal, indescribable, exhilarating, Chuck-pervading, rough, tough, hot, thirsty, sweaty, dirty, dusty, gutsy, risky, life-exhilarating week of my life.



Let me give a few background notes about the trip, a brief (and I mean brief) overview of the places we visited, then I’ll report on the ministry we had and the spiritual lessons I learned that I believe can be of benefit to everyone in God’s Church.

How the Iraq journey was conceived

About 3 months ago Chuck Norris called me and asked, “How would you like to go to Iraq with me?” I heard about his USO trip a year earlier, so I knew exactly why he was going—to encourage the troops. He explained that he was going over again with four-star General Bob Magnus and he would like me to accompany him as well.



As I often do (probably too often), I sarcastically responded back, “How about Hawaii?” He chuckled (no pun intended), then we began to seriously discuss the specifics. I ended saying, “I need to speak to my wife Tracy, my kids, besides having time to pray about it.” He was completely understanding of course.

Tracy’s initial reaction was “No way!” But it didn’t last long. About only 30 seconds later, after knowing how we support the troops and this country, despite its degrading morality and views of Christianity, Tracy replied, “Yes, you above all people can encourage them—you need to go.”

For me it wasn’t that easy—nothing is. I have a wife, 2 kids, and a Church to care for. “I need a sign,” I respectfully prayed to God. (To be honest I don’t ask for those very often, but this was a special case.) I was willing to go if He wanted me to go, but didn’t need to go if He didn’t want me to.

Then it came to me—the sign! I was given it 9 years ago (yes, 9!) after I preached at First Covenant Church in Sacramento. A man walked up to me and said, “God wants you to have this.” I grabbed the article and asked, “Any reason He wants me to have it?” He said, “I have no idea. I just feel God wants you to have this.” He was a very sincere man on a mission, so I simply replied, “I’ll hold on to it until someday it makes sense.” And he walked away.

I wondered about that article through the years—grabbed it after the World Trade Center was hit on 9/11. I looked at it again after we started the Iraqi war; then again after Saddam was beheaded. But it never made sense, until I prayed for a sign after Chuck Norris asked me if I would go to Iraq with him. I pulled it out, walked over to my wife and said, “Look at this.” With quiet but amazed eyes, she said, “There’s your sign.” I told her, “I believe it is--a 9-year old sign.” The article was Iraqi currency—a bill with Saddam’s face on it. When it was given me, it had no connection whatsoever to my life. I held on to it by faith of what that man shared 9 years previously, “God wants you to have it.” He knew I would need a sign, and he delivered it 9 years before. And that’s not that long for God—a blink of His eye. If 1000 years is as one day with God, as the Apostle Peter declared, then I figured He delivered the Iraqi currency to me about 9 seconds or so before we left for Iraq.



From California to Kuwait—or “I guess we’re not in Kansas anymore”

I left on a commercial plane on 9/11 to meet Chuck in Texas—perfect day to leave for this type of mission! I spent the night at his house, enjoyed the fellowship of he and Gena (and their very well mannered, beautiful twins), then we left the next day by private plane to Andrews Air Force Base outside of D.C. There we boarded one of four planes (operated by the Secretary of the Navy) and left for Iraq. The plane was amazing but fitting for flying Generals and others notables to the battlefield. It had twelve seats total—four in front, four in the middle at a table, and four in back—better than First Class no doubt. I was clearly out of my class!



In the front four seats were Chuck, Lt. Gen. James Amos, and Gen. Bob Magnus, and Col. Pete Vercruyse. In the center 4 seats were myself, the Generals’ Aides Maj. Mike Olness and Maj. Dan “Knuckles” Shipley, and Mike Slee—a documentary film expert - www.zaragozapictures.com. In the last four seats were Sergeant Jeff Mueller--military security, Gunnery Sergeant Crosby--a communications expert, a federal agent (assigned to additional security for Magnus), and Jeff Duclos—the publicist for Chuck Norris.



Generals Amos and Magnus (Chuck out of view to left)



The back 8 seats (2 out of view by camera)

One story worth noting about the trip over was, after some military-guy-talk-sailor-language conversations between the three sitting with me, and me starting my normal got-to-have-fun-joking-around-in-any-setting jabbing, “Knuckles” turns to me and says, “So who are you? Why are you with Norris? Are you his agent?” “Not exactly,” I replied. (I actually love settings in which people don’t know who I am or what I do—I prefer having discussions for a while without them knowing, that way they can get to know me without possibly being paranoid that I’m a pastor.) So I responded in good military fashion, “I probably shouldn’t tell you, otherwise I might have to kill you.” (Not exactly the words to say to a guy whose twice my size and ten times the muscle! I would later find out he was also a blue angel and flew in the “shock-n-awe” bomb raids at the beginning of the war on

Baghdad). He snickered, as almost to say, “Okay I’ll play your game.” Then we went on talking. After some more fun, joking, and listening to their military chatter, which included them trying to scare me with their stories on the battlefield (they were somewhat successful!), “Knuckles” turned to me about 5 hours into the flight and said, “Okay, what gives? Who are you?!” Slee and Olness looked intently, as if they wanted to know to—of course Olness knew already, because he had to do all the preparations and background checks to us—but he played along with me, as if to find as much fun in watching me disclose to the two others what I did. “You really want to know?” I asked Knuckles. “I do.” “Okay, here it comes...ready?...I’m Chuck’s pastor.” At first Slee’s eyes widened as if to say, “Oh darn [my language!]
—what did I say wrong?” Knuckles face and response, “Really?”, was obviously a pleasant surprise. From there we began to discuss how he his newly refreshed faith and how he just joined a Bible study (on Romans), and was reading Gary Smalley’s book, “Love Languages,” to build up his relationship with his girlfriend. We had some excellent discussion—the first of what would become dozens and dozens and dozens of spiritual conversations that would start merely by the words, “I’m Chuck’s pastor.” I could really tell I would like these guys a lot—I would never know just how true that fact would become over the next week.



The entire crew (excluding Gen. Amos) in Shannon Ireland—I’m the only one in civilian clothes! (Had my fatigues—utilities—on by the time we hit Kuwait)

We stopped at Shannon, Ireland, to refuel, where we encountered the first plane full of troops (coming from their tour in Iraq), who heard about Church Norris coming but thought they would miss him. Destiny would have it that their plane landed just after ours and we all went into the terminal for an hour stretch. Of course this would be the first of seemingly one hundred situations in which Chuck was mobbed by the military for handshakes, autographs, and photos.

Once airborne again, Knuckles and Olness “demanded” the back 4 seats, which were more comfortable and would allow us some sleep for the next 7 hours of our journey. The federal agent didn’t want to give up his seat, but after Olness pulled rank he coughed it up. The tension between those two would be (I hate to say) a fun thing to watch over the trip up and back—and it got tense at times.

After taking sleeping meds and getting about 6 hours of sleep, I awoke as we came down from the northern part of Iraq and flew over the country on our way to Ali Al Salem AFB in Kuwait, where we would board a C-130 into Iraq after visiting the troops at a couple camps there. Iraq was amazing to travel over, as it was 99% desert, with just a strip of green alongside each shore of the Tigris which runs from north to south in the country. Before landing in Kuwait, I put on my fatigues (utilities to them) and they warned us that it was about 110 degrees outside with a wind of about 20 miles an hour. After exiting the plane, the type of heat that feels like an oven door just opened would follow us everywhere—not to mention the accompanying dirt and sand that filled ever nook, cranny, and pore of clothes and bodies. I loved it! Despite the conditions or feelings I felt, I was committed to take in every aspect of this journey—the good, the bad, and the ugly!



Ali Al Salem in Kuwait

“Team Norris”

After a C-130 canvas-concrete-seat flight and deep descent, we landed in Al Asad, Iraq (where the President had visited one week before) early in the am hours of Friday, 9/14 I believe. After greeting lots of officers and troops, we laid in a bed for the first time in 2 days—but not for long, as needed to be up about 4 hours later. Jet lag you say? No time for it! When it Rome, do as the Romans do. We just kept moving—and slept a little (with a little help from “General *Ambian!*”—easy to follow his orders!).

After the first day Iraq, we split up with the Generals and their Aides (and their entourage), with the goal that we could cover twice the territory with two teams instead of one large one. Though I would have preferred having along Olness and Knuckles (for their sheer experience and protection), they had made other arrangements. In Al Asad, Chuck, Jeff Duclos, Mike Slee, and myself picked up three amazing people: (1) Scott Past, MWR (Morale, Welfare and Recreation) manager, who helped plan and lead our tour; (2) Capt. and Chaplain Mike Langstrom, who was the representative officer, chaplain, and leader of our group (and I soon learned oversaw dozens of chaplains in both Afghanistan then Iraq), and (3) Religious Program Specialist 1st Class Donnie Roland, USN, who served as the chaplain’s personal body guard and had the nickname “Juggernaut.” Hence, “Team Norris” was created. I will share my personal enjoyment of this group in a few minutes.



"Team Norris"

Helicopters that remind me of my 1970 Volkswagen

For the next 5 days we traveled from early morning to late night to and around 15 military bases. We were jetted all over western Iraq in military helicopters, with two gunners, two pilots and always flanked by at least one (but in some areas two) more escorts in the form of cobra helicopters. These are the most monstrous of flying machines—super loud (even with ear plugs—which we always wore) and super shaky—they don't spare the spine any pressure on these flights. We mostly flew in what they called a "53" helo, which they warned me intentionally leaked hydraulic fluid—on the inside! They have a saying in the military, "If it ain't leaking, it ain't flying." They also told me the 53 leaked the least, but my fatigues (utilities) testify that they can create a rain forest! ("Knuckles" shared with me in the plane that he hated flying on those things because "I've lost too many brothers in them." Capt. Mike also shared that he had dropped down in two of them because of mechanical failures—thankfully they were not high enough off the ground, though they hit hard and everyone felt it the next day. Add to their stories that most of these helicopters are from the Vietnam era—we were even told by someone that General Magnus once located the helo he flew in Vietnam (not sure if that's true, but if so it's amazing).



So I might as well tell this helo story now. On the last day of our time in Iraq, after what seemed like 25 flights on these “raining 53’s,” we had to travel our furthest distance. I don’t know the equal in miles, but I know we flew about 1 ½ hours all the way to the Iraq and Syrian border to visit the base Scott told me earlier hasn’t had a visitor in months. It’s pretty amazing to be on one of these helos for a long period of time. Of course I was eating up the experience. Many slept, but Chuck and I read. Yes, read—it broke the focus of the shaking, noise, and heat (about 10 degrees warmer inside the copters). Well, in the same day, after a great visit to the troops there, we had to fly all the way back to a base called TQ, which was back by Fallujah (about 20 miles from Baghdad), where we had been 5 days earlier. It was about a 2 ½ flight and both Scott and Mike guessed that we’d fly back to Fallujah to refuel, but the flight crew wanted to try to shoot us all the way there. Simply difficult to describe the flight—all to say that Chuck said he shrunk an inch because of the pounding down in harmony of the armor with the shaking of the helicopter!



About 2 hours into the flight and about 12,000 feet up, a few of us noticed the back door start to drop down. (Juggernaut and Scott later told me that the lights on the pilot’s control panel was showing low levels of hydraulic fluid—something Capt. Mike said that “happens” once in a while—why on my flight?!). One of the two gunners, a young lady who looks the same age as my 19-year old daughter went to the rear of the helo and manually cranked this lever twice, then the second gunner went back there and tried, as if she failed. In the mean time, the back door keeps dropping, and the drops above my head seem to be dripping less—whether or not they were, I don’t know--but it seemed so! Long story short we were nearly ending our flight and, as they cranked, we were dropping elevation—hopefully to our destination I prayed! As we exited that helo, in what I believed was the last helo flight of the trip, I vowed to pray daily for the helo trips taken by our troops around the world—and then to petition congress to get those new helos out there soon!).

(On a more serious note, it was fascinating the other day I heard a helicopter fly overhead back here in California and I felt for just a moment a flicker of the post-feelings our real war heroes feel who have to struggle with noises mimicking the battlefield.)

Was I ever scared?

One of the questions I've been asked a lot is, "Was I ever scared?" The simple answer is "yes." After all, I'm human and we were in a war zone in which 3000 plus of our troops have been killed. But the bigger truth is that we neither had time nor the energy to feel much fear. Like running a marathon, you're pretty focused on the footsteps in front of you. (Of course the helicopter rides, tales, and casualties truly didn't help.)

Actually, there were a few things I didn't tell my family or the Church, because I didn't want anyone to worry (any more than they were naturally doing already). First, we would be in Iraq during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan (which brings heightened alert in Iraq for increased extremist threats). Second, according to government reports (Stars and Stripes—10/19/07), EFP (explosively formed penetrator devices) attacks were up 40% since Spring—which meant our body armor was for all practical purposes useless.

The greatest reasons, however, I did not fear most of the time were because I was convinced God was calling me to go and has our day of birth and death in the palm of His hands (control), Tracy had what I would call a supernatural peace that everything would be fine, and, most of all, the Lord has given us the promise in Psalm 27:1-3:

The LORD is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The LORD is the defense of my life; Whom shall I dread? When evildoers came upon me to devour my flesh, My adversaries and my enemies, they stumbled and fell. Though a host encamp against me, My heart will not fear; Though war arise against me, In *spite of* this I shall be confident.

Visiting 15 military bases and nearly 20,000 troops in 5 days

I find it genuinely almost impossible to describe or summarize the visits to the 15 military bases. Suffice it here for me to say this. At each base we would be carted around to several locations, at which a crowd would be gathered to meet and greet. It was often repeated at least 5-8 times at every base—which meant we made at least 75 meet-n-greet stops in Iraq. The settings were as few as 10 troops to as many as 2000. This didn't include hospital visits, in which we would go room to room.



Me at one of many hospital visitations

Part of the big goal of this trip was to go where other celebrities and notables didn't go—remote camps where troops undoubtedly endured much isolation. Each one testified that they “didn't believe Chuck Norris was really coming. We can't believe you came all the way out here.” What a joy it truly was to visit with these smaller bands of troops on the outskirts of the country. How they lived in these hot, dry, dirty, dusty conditions for months on end I will never know, but it gives me a genuine appreciation for what our service men and women go through all over this world. It also prompts me to pray even more for them.

Because we were moved around so much, it was easy to get lost in what we said at one location to the next. In the locations and small groups in which Chuck introduced me as “his pastor,” I would often have several conversations about the Lord, Chuck, his faith and service, or simply answering the troops questions about Christianity. It was an instant catalyst for conversations. As one put it, “If you're cool enough to be Chuck's pastor, you're cool enough to be mine in this moment.” Time and again these type of words would open doors (and windows) to discuss faith, God, Jesus, and the Bible. At each location I was often holding back tears in gratefulness for the avenues opened by just being with Chuck. I expected good things, but my expectations were surpassed by the degree to which I was able to minister. It truly was overwhelming and one of the greatest joys I've experienced. If I were to describe half of these times of sharing, this writing would be 100 times the length.

Why I went

- Because the Great Commission calls us to “go” and make disciples of all nations
- Because I believe God was calling me to go specifically to Iraq with Chuck
- Because it fulfills the Church's C-3 Vision
- To support, talk with, and pray for the troops
- To support and pray for Chuck
- Because 20 years ago I made a commitment to God as an atheist—that if revealed Himself to me and showed me the purpose for life, I'd spend my life going wherever He wanted helping (not pounding in) others that purpose as well—a plan that is outlined in the pages of the “master blueprint” or Bible.

Additional reasons (I discovered in Iraq) why God wanted me to go

- To minister to certain officers, leaders, and other military personnel
- To connect with Chaplain Langston and other military chaplains
- To complement and continue Chuck's ministry with the military. My participation and presence spoke loud and clear to others that Chuck was a devoted Christian. I didn't fully realize until I was there how critical that was.

- To be a connection to American media. While we were in Iraq, I encouraged Chuck to send a message back to American media about his trip there, to open even further doors back in the States. We sent back three primary messages: Chuck was in Iraq, the surge is working, and morale is up—way up! Fascinating that the Internet news caught on like wildfire. Even Jay Leno ended up talking about it, though in jest, ““Chuck Norris is over in Iraq visiting the troops. Today, Chuck said the troop surge is working. Keep in mind, this is the same guy that said the whole Total Gym thing works, too. So, I don’t know.” Even mocking inadvertently spreads the news!
- To better understand what our troops and their families go through back home. I was only there for a week. They are there for months. I only tasted what they have to endure.
- To learn lessons of leadership and teach those lessons to the Church
- To further test the extents of my own faith and trust in the Lord--that this was a stewardship trial for something even greater

(And the bonus is that the whole time I received FREE cardiac jumps in the form of helicopter rides!)

Highlights of the trip for me



- **Being with the troops:** Though I loved being at the large camps, I loved even more the small venues that allowed them to share with Chuck and the rest of us. In 20,000 troops I didn’t hear one complaint about their situation, the war, or anything. That’s pretty amazing being that pastors live hearing complaints of one sort or another. These troops give me hope for a new generation of leadership! I was blown away over how committed and positive they were. The media gives such a liberal slant that doesn’t exist among these troops. Their morale was up, and they believe they can win this war. It was nothing short of a joy to get to know so many

of them, and hear their thoughts about war, life, and Chuck Norris! Going to the outlying posts/bases were a particular blessing, because very few did.



Chuck and I meeting with Iraqi and American troops

- **Being with the Iraqi army and civilians** On a couple of occasions we were able to meet with the Iraqi soldiers and civilians. It was great to watch their response to Chuck—we came across many different cultures in Iraq and they all knew him! Chuck tells a funny story about how one Iraqi soldier talked about a rat scene from his Mission in Action 2 movie—you can read it in his World Net Daily article about the tour (http://wnd.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=57790)



Generals Magnus, Amos, and me

- **Being with the Generals and crew** If Generals Amos and Magnus represent the type of leadership we have in the military, America should be very proud. Their leadership, humility, inspiration, and genuineness revealed to me in just a short time what amazing leaders they are. I was often mesmerized by how they spoke as

fathers to the troops and boosted their morale by their mere presence. On top of that the professionalism, cordiality, service, and fun of their Aides, Knuckles, Olness, and Vercruysse made the trip especially enjoyable. A special thanks to Knuckles for the fellowship, Vercruysse and Olness for all their assistance and service—Olness even borrowed me some civilian clothes in German (from “huge” Sergeant Crosby) because I left my dress clothes in Texas—not knowing we would go to a nice dinner in Germany (how Crosby’s extra-large clothes stayed on my body is another story!).



Majors “Knuckles” Shipley and Olness

A word to the crew...Knuckles: I think I see marriage in your future—you know where to find a minister! Olness: I’m missing some gear—any ideas? Pete: I’ll try not to be bitter that you sat in my seat by Chuck the whole flight! (Kidding!). Seriously, you’re all the best! I appreciate everything you did for all of us.



“Team Norris” again

- **Being with “Team Norris”** How unexpected to spend a week with 6 men in a war zone in Iraq and call it one of the best times of your life! It was and it will always be! A quick word for each of these gentlemen:

Scott Past: Calm, cool, and always the great leader! So what happened in Baghdad? If you don't fill me in, I'm going to start crying!

Jeff Duclos: What an absolute joy it has been to get to know you more than just on e-mail! You're a fun and gifted man to do what you're doing—and you're great at what you do—of course it helped that I was with you!

Mike Slee: You're one amazing, gutsy dude—and film maker! Never met your equal! I look forward to see your future productions and of course being your commentator (or was that "comic relief") on at least one more future shoot. Be nice to your mama! And watch those socks in Baghdad!

Capt. Mike: God alone brought us together—and I see that completely now. Your presence and leadership is so needed in the war zone! You've got my daily prayers, for you and our brothers out in the field. I so look forward to hear how you will affect military chaplaincy in the years to come. God bless you brother—stay the course! And, God willing, I'd love to see you next May back east!

RP1: Wow! Thanks for your model of servanthood and sacrifice. You've taught me more than you know. Somehow I think I'm going to see you again, even closer to home!

Chuck: You're nothing short of amazing and inspiring! How do you do it all?? Thank you for allowing me the honor of accompanying you—I will never forget it—ever! So...can we go to Hawaii next time?!



Chaplain Mike and me

- **Meeting Chaplain Mike and other chaplains.** Mike told us the story that they needed an officer to lead around "Team Norris" and since he was a captain, they turned to him and asked if he would do so. It was nothing short of a God-appointment, as the Lord opened so many doors through us working together. One big door was sending out an e-mail to 40,000 troops (double the number we met) and gave them links to check out Chuck's World Combat League and his Christian writings. With Chuck having won their minds in person, we believe he can help win their hearts for God in his writings. We will pray about and continue to explore other ways to allow Chuck's ministry to touch the lives of military personnel overseas.



- **Being with Chuck** (if I don't highlight him alone—he might get mad and round house me! Just kidding!) After spending nearly two weeks together, I can truly say that Chuck and his wife, Gena, are two of the most caring, insightful, and fun Christian people I've ever known. They could easily pitch tent (or something larger!) on a remote island with blue seas and white sands for the rest of their lives. But instead they spend most of their lives in humanitarian, Christian, and philanthropic causes, continuing to try and influence this world for the good. From Chuck's new Christian-based western books and weekly (Monday) column at World Net Daily (www.wnd.com), to their involvement in getting a Bible curriculum in 295 public school districts in America (www.bibleinschools.net), to his plans of doing a Christian movie based upon one of Randy Alcorn's book, to helping tens of thousands of at-risk young people to learn martial arts via Kickstart-- www.kickstart.org (funded 100% by a world-wide expansion of his World Combat League--

<http://www.worldcombatleague.com/>), to visitations like this to Iraq, etc., their Christian commitment and service is clear and commendable.

What the Church (Christians) can learn from the military (troops)

There were many lessons I learned over there: some about the warfare in which the U.S. is engaged (and the power struggles in the Middle East), others about the spiritual opportunities and ramifications during a time of war, and still others about the solidarity, passion, and commitment of our military personnel, etc. I want to finish this particular reflection giving a few of those lessons I believe the Church of Jesus Christ (across denominational lines) can learn from our military—yes, our military.

1. **We're in a war—and that war is worth fighting.** The troops are passionate about the war they are fighting—they believe they have an upper hand against insurgents, and they believe they can win this war. Sometimes I wonder if Christians are convinced of the same in the spiritual war we fight. Sometimes I wonder how many Christians are truly convinced that they are in a real war in which they must play a role—and that they are confident about them winning. Ephesians 6:12 is true, “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.” We're in a war—and that war is worth fighting! And that spiritual war requires spiritual solutions (ammunition)!
2. **We will go where we are commanded to go.** Our troops willingness to go serve where commanded is off the chart—placing themselves in harm's way. And I thought, “If only all Christians were as willing to go into spiritual war as they are a national one.” Jesus didn't give us an option in the Great Commission, when he said, “Go into all the world and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19-20). In Isaiah 6:8, the Lord asks, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?” Then [Isaiah] said, “Here am I. Send me.” Are we as willing as Isaiah? As our troops?
3. **We are passionate to serve.** The Marines have an equivalent to what a Christian might consider an “amen.” It's said when one agrees with a statement or is excited or moved about something, even in times of trouble and war, “Oooraaw!” Is our “amen” as strong as the Marine “Oooraaw”? The Apostles were so passionate in Acts 5:41, “So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for *His* name.” Are we as passionate and willing as they to serve our spiritual Commander-in-Chief?
4. **We respect and submit to one another.** The Church should recognize what the military believes and lives by: there are two types of people in this life--those who lead and those who follow, and every man and woman must master doing both. It is as if they say in harmony, “If you're going to go, go all the way! If you're going to stay, stand your ground. If you can't run with the big dogs, big dog, let me walk you out. If you can't lead, let me by you. If you want follow, get out of the way. You're taking up space!” Ephesians 5:21 says, “Submit to one another, out of reverence for Christ.” Whatever happened to the days when people would say, “sir,” “ma'am,”

“thank you,” “please,” etc. Whatever happened to the days when people (including Christians) showed respect to even those with whom they disagreed?

5. **We enlist in different branches but we are one in purpose—to defend the U.S. and her interests.** Though there is pride in the fact that they are Marines, Sailors, Soldiers, and Airman, when they're in the war zone you can't notice a difference. If only the different Christian churches could do the same! We praise the Lord with our mouths on Sundays, and shoot friendly fire from the tongue on Mondays! If we are in a war, why can't we fight as one together? Friendly fire flies far to frequently from Christian to Christian, and church to church! That is why 1 Corinthians 12:25 says, “that there should be no division in the body, but *that* the members should have the same care for one another.” Rather than stress the differences between us we should be emphasizing the unity, as Ephesians 4:3-6, “Be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.”
6. **We don't live or fight by ourselves—we can't win alone.** Rarely do you see an individual alone, and never in battle. No one wins a war by themselves. And yet that is what so many Christians do—try to win their own battles all by themselves. We were created to live in community, and we thrive when we have others help us. But do we believe that? And do our actions testify to that belief? Infantries are not made up of numbers of one—neither are spiritual Infantries. Proverbs 15:22 says, “Without consultation, plans are frustrated, But with many counselors they succeed.” The question is will we ask for help, or go it alone? Do we really believe we are in a spiritual battle, accept that God has given us others to help us, but still choose to wage war with just “Jesus and me”?
7. **We endure hardship and suffering.** There's no draft at the moment. The troops we met enlisted, and a host of them re-enlist over and over (Chuck reinlisted two Navy Seals why we were there). Many are on multiple deployments to Iraq. I saw troops in the most trying and demanding of circumstances—younger than my 20-year old son. And what blew me away was that not one of them complained—in nearly 20,000! They live, sleep, and fight in sometimes 130-140 degree temperatures, in the dry, dusty deserts of the Middle East, yet they remain faithful. Semper Fidelis or Semper Fi—“Always faithful.” Is that our attitude toward sacrifice and service for the living God? Too many Christians grumble and complain! All the while 2 Timothy 2:3-4 admonishes us, “Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the One who enlisted him as a soldier.”
8. **We take care of our brothers and sisters—no matter what.** They sacrifice for one another—cover one another's back, and will pay the ultimate price if they have to. The military don't watch and critique others in warfare. When a brother or sister is under attack, they move to help. If only every Christian were the same! Not examining the way others shoot, nor criticizing the ways they march, or even pointing out their weaknesses in combat. Jesus gave one definitive sign so that anyone can recognize true believers in John 13:35: “By this all men will know that

you are My disciples, if you have love [or sacrifice] for one another." So the question is: what will you sacrifice for another brother or sister? If I might be so bold to ask, what would you sacrifice for me? Who will you take a bullet for?



"Juggernaut" and me

"From a man who will I take a bullet"

Speak of taking a bullet for you, I want to start wrapping up by telling you about Religious Program Specialist First Class Donnie Roland, USN, as his military protector. We called him the gentle giant, who was also nicknamed "Juggernaut." He told me, "If you want me to help you, just call for 'RP1.'" But if you're in trouble, then yell for "Juggernaut" and [he said with a smile] I will break down the gates of hell."

Donnie is only 40 years old and has spent 20 years in the military—in fact he's retiring next year. While all of us were gabbing for one week straight, Donnie probably said a dozen lines—truly a man of few words. He is a simple man from the south—a great example to all of us of servanthood and sacrifice. Even when we invited him into conversations, he'd just remain quiet, always respectful, but you knew (you knew!) if you were in trouble this man would sacrifice his life for you. What's most amazing is that he would die for someone he didn't even know very well—made me wonder, would I?

I had "Team Norris" sign the back of my utility jacket at the end of the week. Juggernaut was hesitant, not because he didn't want to, but because he didn't want to make a big deal out of anything he did. After a few others walked over and signed the jacket, Juggernaut stepped up and slowly walked over. I didn't read the coat until I got home. The words he wrote will touch my heart forever. He simply penned, "Todd, from a man who will I take a bullet for. Donnie aka Juggernaut."



One who took a bullet for you

Without taking away any due respect to Donnie or anyone else serving, I would be an unfit Christian leader if I didn't have you all lastly reflect upon the fact that the very heart of the Christian message and God's love for you is that Jesus Christ did take a bullet for you. And why? 1 Thessalonians 5:9-10 tell us, "For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we are live or die, we may live together with Him." Jesus died in our place and took the punishment of our sin upon Himself, that whoever accepts that fact will live forever with Him.

20 years ago I accepted that fact upon a mountain in Yosemite. You don't have to be on a mountain top. You can do that right now, wherever you are—even if you are listening to me from any battlefield. All you have to do is pray from your heart these words. Ready? Pray sincerely to God,

"Heavenly Father, I confess that I cannot live up to all that you require. In other words, I sin—I am a sinner. I understand now that Jesus came to offer His life upon the Cross as a ransom for my sin—he died in my place. He "took the bullet" of punishment for me. I accept that fact, right here, right now. I believe that your son, Jesus Christ died for my sins, was resurrected from the dead, is alive, and hears my prayer even now. I invite Him to become the Lord of my life, to rule and reign in my heart from this day forward. Please send your Holy Spirit now to help me, so that I can be the soldier you want me to be—to serve You and Your will for the rest of my life. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen."

If you prayed that prayer today, write us pastors and tell us how we can be praying for you. And make sure, whether here or somewhere, you join a "military spiritual base"

(Church) so that you can learn the tactics of spiritual warfare and fight the good fight of faith with others.

When the helicopter comes for battle

Friends, we're in a war—and the stakes affect eternity! It's a spiritual war—and the enemy does not want you to win. And, as soldiers of the Cross, God calls us to remain enlisted in this spiritual warfare until we are called home by our Commander-in-Chief. And the question He will ask in that day is not how well you fought on the battlefields of an earthly war, but the battlefields of a spiritual one? Will you be known in that day as a Christian who stayed on the frontlines? Or one who went AWOL? One who empowered others to fight or as one who is in the reserves, commentating from the sidelines? Will you tell others your own stories of victory on the spiritual battlefields, or merely recount those of others?

Bottom line, how will your courage mount the next time you hear spiritual helicopters flying overhead to take you into battle? Will you fear they run out of Holy Ghost hydraulic fluid?? Or will you jump on board and say, "Today, the Lord will have victory in Jesus' name!"

It's coming friends! Do you hear it? The helicopter is coming right now to take you into battle!

"Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might." (Ephesians 6:10)



(A complete copy of this same report with **COLOR** photos can be printed out from our Church website-- www.nationaltreasures.org. You can also find there an **AUDIO** message of Todd's tour by scrolling down to the sermon player at the end of the website and pressing the 9/30/07 message, "From the frontlines of Fallujah and our future.")