

The Protean Rubric

Vol. #40

The ΘΣΤ Alumni Assn. Newsletter

JANUARY, 2002

Theta Sigma Tau Alumni Association

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Quotable Quotes

“Abstract” . . . that’s Art Speak for ‘I spilled paint all over my canvas while drunk, will you buy it anyway?’”

- Wiola Martin

“I want a full report on Halloween Tau style.”

‘Oh, really? You mean, have me write a series of limericks and sing them to you in the nude?’”

- Drew Rich/Pete Lenz

“Your toys are fun to touch, mine are all sticky.”

- Ralph Wiggums, from *The Simpsons*

“Next time you decide to drive illegally, make sure the car you’re in is legal.”

- A police officer to Plenz’s brother, stopped for a burned out taillight when driving with a suspended license

Individual News Updates

Amy “Monchichi” Alberts “...is living in Bellevue, WA and is now a full-time Microsoftie after contracting with Microsoft for 4 months. She’s a “Usability Engineer” on the largest and most-visited corporate website in the world, www.microsoft.com. This means that it’s her job to ensure that certain areas of the 4-million-page-website (like the Download Center and Shop) are “user friendly.” Outside of working way too much, she enjoys tending to her little black cat Vito, hiking the eastside trails, and traveling to see various friends who are scattered like a white powdery substance all around the country.”

Steve Banasiewicz (89) “...and Paul (spouse) are happily rounding out one year in their new home in suburban Connecticut. They’ve Just refinanced the mortgage before the rates headed back up. The house has new vinyl siding in a forest green and many new windows. Incredible wood rot and several carpenter ant nests were discovered and removed and/or replaced in the process. 1300 spring bulbs were added to the yard in various places this fall, the beginning of the master plan. Steve is finishing out his 8th year as an employee of RGIS Inventory Specialists, as an Auditor (having climbed the ladder of management and stared in the face of corporate America, he leapt back down to the ground floor, saving his sanity). Paul is reaching 7 3/4 years at ESPN, presently a MIS group supervisor. With regret, we admit that we didn’t get to the drive in this year.”

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Paul Bernheimer (80) and his wife Vicki "...celebrated their 19th anniversary back in August. Our daughter, Alex, is now about 2.5 years old and newborn son , PJ, is three weeks old. I am a Sr. analyst at Allstate Insurance Co working on the workstation support team. My hobbies include changing dirty diapers and fixing sippy cups. I also have a passion for fine cigars. For current photos or cigar info please check out my web site:<http://home.netcom.com/~partagas/main.html>".

Mike Cason reports: “After getting kicked out of Ripon twice, I got my Associates Degree (cum laude) in ’98 and my Bachelor’s of Science degree in Accounting (cum laude) this past summer. (says something about the educational standard at state university...) I’m working at a small CPA firm in the South suburbs of Chicago. It’s a nice place with 2 owners and about a dozen employees. There’s a lot of travel involved since most of the audit clients are scattered around the country. Beginning Oct. 29 and through March, I expect to be traveling out of state about every other week.”

Kevin Clancy is a senior at UW-Milwaukee majoring in Film Studies with a minor in Psychology (tho’ he’s contemplating taking a little extra time and turning the Psych minor into a major). He works for the university as an AV Tech and also in the publicity dept.

André Cunningham has been promoted to Captain and is now the Signal Officer for an Aviation Group.

Rich (Wookiee) Dammkoehler (92) reports: “The Dammkoehlers have recently moved to Chicago IL. Rich is working for Micro General Corp. at their down-town location. When not working Rich enjoys playing with his daughter, Gabrielle Rae and hanging out with his wife Melanie. In his spare time, Rich reads, watches movies, works on his model railroad, and studies his own navel lint.”

Bruce “Dad” Davis (82) “..is still above ground and recently celebrated 20 years of service with Raytheon Company. He is a Subcontract Administrator and works on several FAA related programs. Bruce has also been re-admitted to Andover-Newton Theological School to continue studies for the Master of Divinity degree leading to ordination for parish ministry. Having stepped down as Assistant Pastor in his home church this summer, Bruce is a candidate for Senior Pastor (part-time) at another local congregation, a decision is likely in early 2002. [Ed. Note: a follow up email from Bruce informs us that: “Announcing that I have been elected Pastor of the Lynnfield Community Church, UCC of Lynnfield MA to begin pastorate on Jan 13, 2002. You get the news first, I have not told the Alumni Office yet {Jannan: nyah nyah!}. This may effect my ability to attend alumni weekend in June. I will be serving as a part-time pastor (20 hours) plus my regular job must be continued and divinity school. Now I know how I am going to continue to pay for school! Hoo-ray! It is a Merry Christmas!” Now the rest of Bruce’s original blurb continues...] “Bruce’s wife, Beth is serving as president of the Shoe City Lions Club in Lynn; anyone familiar with these service organizations will know that it means Bruce is the “other” club secretary. Bruce is a Director of the Wyoma Lions Club having already served as club president and several higher offices beyond the club level. Bruce is often in demand as a motivational speaker and installing officer at Lions functions. Daughter Olivia Ruth is now in the 5th grade and like many others has become a devoted “Harry Potter” fan, enjoys reading, playing the piano and is learning to play the flute. She says she wants to go to Ripon College and be a Tau just like Dad.”

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Tony and Jamie (Smith) Dieckhoff announced the birth of their son, Carter James. Carter was born on October 2, 2001 at 5:12am. Congrats!

Angie Herin moved in December to Cedar Rapids, IA, with her boyfriend, Jon Crook. Jon will be rejoining his old band, once and possibly still known as *Breaker*. Angie hopes to find Cedar Rapids a bit more promising in the job market than Oshkosh has been. She says she will still visit Ripon for major house functions and, once she has some form of internet set up, she'll get in touch with folks online.

Carol (Shay) Hornung (88) "...can't quite believe it's been almost 13 years since graduation. She's amassed quite a collection of agent and publisher rejections for her mystery novel, but continues plugging forward on the sequel and commiserates with fellow students in writing classes at the UW Extension in Madison. Her husband, Tony, and kids (Ben, 1 1/2 and Shaun, 7 1/2) would prefer she spent more time with them, though they seem to appreciate her part-time radio traffic gig at Triple M and the Buzz. Free concert tickets are one of the many perks brought home, as well as the occasional paycheck. Carol has also completed her O.W.L.s in Harry Potter Trivia and challenges any brave soul to a contest at the next summer party."

Bryan Kuhn (00) says: "i'm an outdoors person with a dash of hyperactivity and am glad to adhere to the 3 rules of an english pub: no talking about football, politics, or religion. when i do, it usually gets pretty ugly, either way. i graduated in double-ought with an oh-so-useful AB (BA for everyone who didn't pay attention at commencement) in philosophy, and am living the cliché liberal arts grad lifestyle. yeah, that's right, i live at home, work in retail, and can't seem to simultaneously pay the student loan and save for grad school."

Pete Lenz (89) is currently completing his doctorate in Cognitive Psychology (to be completed fall 2002) at UW-Milwaukee. He is still working at the University as the Senior NIH Research Assistant in the R. M. Warren Perception Laboratory, and is likely to continue on there with a post-doc appointment for another few years once his degree is complete. Pete is engaged to Viola Martin (Ripon/Tau, 2002), they plan to be married September 28, 2002. Pete, who lives in Whitefish Bay, WI, has no kids but he dotes upon his cat, Misty. In his spare time Pete reads, maintains and updates his and the Alumni Assn. websites, and plays Shadowfist (a collectable card game) and various computer games like Diablo II and Civilization.

Rick and Amy (Metz) Lowe are ". . .doing just fine. The first snowfall here last week was pretty brutal . . . thank god for snowblowers. I am currently unemployed, for medical reasons and Rick should be receiving his yearly review any day now. (Hopefully to include a promotion and raise). Rick has also decided to go after his MBA at the Univ. Twin Cities @Carlson School of Management. Pray for me, he is turning out to be a professional student. All of the critters are doing fine...Kesmer now 6 is an old fart, Nerys age 5 is still pyscho, Nelli,3, is just her old couch-potato self, and the newest member to the clan...Chloe almost one, is trying the patience of everyone in the house.

Julie (Johnston, '91) & John Milavec announce the birth of their third child, Lucas, born November 23, 2001. Congrats!

Barb (Thompson) Pamperin (89) reports: "I am living one mile off of hwy 41 near Allenton, Wisconsin, which happens to be right on the way to Ripon when coming from Milwaukee (hint, hint.) I am working at a non-profit professional association, calling myself web coordinator (hopefully to be promoted to something that sounds cooler than that) and tending several web sites. I have been married to Jeff Pamperin for 12 years and we have 2 kids, Angela (6) and Kyle (2). I try to be the stable one of the bunch, so not much changes with me."

Natasha Peters exchanged commitment vows with Catey McMullon on October 20, 2001. Congrats!

Nancy (Williams) Ryan (90) works in Germantown at Smith & Nephew Rehabilitation. She makes pre-formed splints as well as die-cutting and injection molding. Nancy has been married for 5 1/2 years to Roland Ryan. They lived until recently in Allenton, WI, but have moved to Menomonee Falls. Roland is a musician who has his own solo show, "Brave, not Crazy," that he does at bars, private parties, and weddings.

K.C. "Random Numbers" Schmitz (03) "...is currently frittering away her precious youth bull****ing teachers and working at a fast-food sandwich shop. She'll probably graduate next year, we hope, if school doesn't interfere too much with her new baby - and if her cocaine addiction doesn't spin wildly out of control."

Dave Slate (01) is welcomed into the ranks of the Alumni Association. Dave has left Ripon College with plans to head to Florida.

Lisa Flegel Sottile (88) "...is living in Milwaukee, WI with her husband of eight years, Craig, and children Rebecca (7) and Anthony (3). She attained a MFA in Stage Management from UW-Milwaukee in 1992. She has had a good number of theatrical jobs since and is currently working for Next Act Theatre in Milwaukee. Yes, some of us actually end up working IN our fields. Craig is the Coordinator of Educational Technology at Brookfield East High School (one of us needs a steady paycheck). Rebecca is in 2nd grade at Woodlands School and is an avid reader, currently on the 4th Harry Potter book. Anthony has just started a bit of preschool for fun and loves anything with wheels, but especially sprint cars. Craig has also been doing a bit of remodeling, developing a full and messy basement into a bedroom, bathroom, and rec room with laundry and work room still in progress. Lisa and Craig are also continuing a fairly active social life, alternating kid watching with recreation.

Josh Tobler (00) reports: "Yes, the Ripon vortex has yet to release its grip upon me. After graduating in December 2000, I started working at Alliance Laundry Systems. That's Speed Queen for the old folks. I started there in February as a temp to hire in their service parts department. In October, I moved into the Production Control department and became a permanent employee as a Material Planner with all the great benefits. If that all isn't scary enough, I actually enjoy my job. :) I plan to reattend Ripon College in January to take a few classes. That's right, I will be an active yet again. The good thing is that this time Alliance will be paying for my education. Woohoo! I plan to stay in Ripon and at Alliance for the next few years. I do plan to continue my education after Ripon, but not sure where that will be just now. I'm not sure where I will make my presence known next."

Darlene Wulf (00) lives in Westfield, WI, and works in Portage, WI. Dar is a child care teacher at The Learning Tree, a daycare center, and has been certified to work with infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. In her spare time Dar likes to do cross-stitch and threatens to pound anyone else who compares her to her grandmother for this!

Letters From the Front

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A continuing series, excerpts from emails sent in by 2nd Lt. George Johnson (00) who is currently assigned to the DMZ in Korea.

October 4:

So I went to this Korean joint for a going away dinner for one of the LTs who is leaving. It is in Munsan which is 5 km south of Greaves on the opposite side of the Imjin river. The place was advertised as an all you can eat buffet. So I showed up expecting the friggin' Grand Buffet bar of steaming Korean food.

After leaving my shoes outside the door I walked in and noticed the tables (low to the floor of course) have a burner in the center of them. Also the buffet was packed with ice. It was all raw food. They had about four or five types of beef marinated in various things, bacon, chicken, duck, fish, squid, pork in several forms (including pork intestine) and some stuff whose origins I was unsure of. You get a heaping plate of raw stuff (including onion, mushrooms, peppers) for cooking and take it back to your seat. Throw it on the grill and start cooking. You head back up to the bar and use a separate plate for prepared items. They have seaweed, rice and vegetable roll ups. Several types of cooked rice, soups, noodles, veggies, pickles, kimshi, seasoned soy sauce. When you get back to your seat you stir the meat up for a while longer and then dig in.

The Koreans around us tended to take a leaf of lettuce and put meat and rice and some sauce in it and then wrap it up and chow down. Pretty good stuff. Actually it was great.

It cost only 7000 Won (about \$4) for all you can eat. So I can finally say that I have found a restaurant in Korea I really love. It makes sense I had to go off post to find it.

October 6:

I decided to tell the story of CPT Bonifas today. Camp Greaves is 3 km from the DMZ and the only American BN north of the Imjin River, but it is not the only unit up there. 3 km north of us there is a UN sponsored unit ON the DMZ. The Joint Security Area (JSA) is the force that does ceremonial duties in Panmunjom at the actual sight of the Military Demarcation Line (MDL). The MDL is the line in the center of the DMZ that is the actual border. There is a set of buildings that are used for treaties and stuff and the south side is manned by JSA guards and the north by NK soldiers. There is even a special negotiation room ON the MDL with half the room NK and half SK.

In any case, up in the JSA there are guard posts along the MDL and sometimes vegetation grows up in between the posts and we send parties out to trim them. In 1975 the annual tree trimming party was sent out consisting of Korean tree trimmers and led by CPT Bonifas, an American Officer serving up at JSA (JSA personnel lived at a place called Camp Liberty Bell). A NK officer who saw them set to work ordered them to stop their work (he had no authority to do so) CPT Bonifas told him that they were engaging in prearranged and routine work and ordered the work to continue. By this time there were twenty NK soldiers in the area as opposed to two US military officers and 5 Korean workers. Further words were exchanged and the NK officer shouted for his soldiers to kill the Americans. The tree-trimming party was overwhelmed by the NKs who took the hatchets of the tree trimmers and hacked CPT Bonifas and his LT subordinate to death. The Koreans escaped with severe beatings. Unbeknownst to the NKs the surveillance cameras on our side of the MDL recorded the entire incident (I have seen it, pretty gruesome stuff).

A war almost started, Greaves went to full alert immediately and rushed to reinforce and if necessary evacuate JSA south of the Imjin. Shortly after this the entire peninsula went to DEFCON 2. The NKs managed to convince us that the incident was the result of an overzealous officer and had him executed. The United States Army completed the tree-trimming mission (this time with combat engineers backed up by tanks and air support).

We learned a lot from that incident, we learned anything can happen in Korea, even when we don't expect it. We learned that we must always be alert, CPT Bonifas was a husband and father who was only weeks from going home from Korea. The JSA base is no longer called Liberty Bell. A couple times a week the 1-506 runs up MSR-1, past the Joint Security Area...Camp Bonifas.

October 20:

Well the rice harvest has arrived in Korea. They harvest rice in this area mostly by hand. The thing that really is irritating to us is that they need to dry the rice, which means scattering the rice out on a large flat area in the sun. So they do it in the middle of every damn road in Area I. I think they purposefully choose roads the Army uses. See, if they put it on a road used by Terminators (giant Korean dump trucks) the Terminators will run right over the rice without a second thought there is nothing the farmer can do about it. But if they set it up on a road the Army uses, we are required to stop. If we don't stop then the

farmer will come to the Army with a grossly inflated damages bill that we are required to pay. Sometimes Adashi shows up with the bill even when we don't run over his rice (Koreans have entrepreneurial spirit that puts the Robber Barons of the 1800s to shame).

So this has a major impact on our training. We have to try to plan our training so we roll to and from the field on the Sabbath or in the middle of the night. Between this and the heightened alert status it is hard to get any training done. The Force Protection Condition (FPCON) requires us to have guys patrolling and guarding, on Quick Reaction Force (QRF) duty, and armed Humvees at the gates. It is so far above our normal level that while only a fraction of the BN is on duty at any one time, keeping it up 24 hours a day seven days a week means that everyone is busy. The lesson, boys and girls, is that you must be trained to go to war before the war starts because things are too crazy after it starts to get much meaningful training done. (Which is why you can't ramp up military spending only during a crisis, by the time the money does any good the crisis is over one way or the other.)

Leisure time activities at Camp Greaves mostly revolve around either drinking or leaving Camp Greaves (usually to drink). It is just not terribly interesting here.

There are marvelous vistas to be seen of the river and of the North Korean mountains but they are all spoiled because you are looking through barbed wire and you look around and see fighting positions on the wire, mortar pits and command bunker in the center of the base, radar and commo sites on all the mountain tops in the distance and convoys of armored vehicles crossing the bridge. It sounds like a Bosnian cease-fire up here. Most of the ranges are up here where it is sparsely populated, so every Tom, Dick and Harry is up here shooting everything from 9mm pistols to 155mm howitzers. When the firing is not keeping you up, the propaganda speakers blaring Opera music in Korean is. Some is the ROKs and some is NK propaganda. It's annoying when it is 3AM.

We have a movie theatre that is about a month to two months behind the US. They showed "Rock Star" last night, I don't know when that came out in the states, but at least since we run our own theatre we make our own rules. We have the only theatre on the peninsula you can carry in your own beer.

We watch a LOT of DVDs and Videos. The selection at the PX sucks so Amazon does a brisk business at Camp Greaves. Current favorites on post include "Don't Be a Menace", "Lethal Weapon 4", "Hannibal" and my personal favorite "Office Space". I think Office Space is such a hit because our BN commander talks exactly like Lumsford, the protagonist's boss. "Did you get the memo? yeahhh... if you could just type that report up now that would be greeaaattt..."

The Army learned in Germany that terrorists love nightclubs, discos, bars and restaurants. Bader Meinhoff killed a number of servicemen that way. So soldiers are no longer aloud to go downrange to the bars and clubs. It has devastated the prostitution industry (formally secure as hell since prostitution is legal in Korea). Since the Joes are no longer even allowed to go into bars which often front for prostitution (it may be legal but the Joes are forbidden by Army regulation to solicit prostitutes, thus the bar dodge). The towns outside most large bases are ghost towns. I think some are starting to front out of cell phone stores and tailor shops. As I said before, Koreans are nothing if not possessing of the entrepreneurial spirit. So the average Friday night for a Joe here at Greaves is to get outta work at 1715 or so and go to the chow hall for dinner, then a trip by the PX to secure cases of beer and movies from the meager selection here. Then off to their barracks for a wild night of movies and beer. God is it any wonder they get into fights with each other, they are bored outta their minds. It is better in the summer, they can have Bar-B-Ques and swim in the pool and play Frisbee and lay on the helipad at night and stare at the stars. Now as the winter closes in there is frost every night and the options are closing in. It's kinda like living in Ripon in the winter but with no K-Mart or much of any stores really. Also no women, bars, restaurants, college, or library. The rough bits are going to be Thanksgiving and Christmas, a lot of the younger Joes are just outta High School and have never been away from their family on the holidays.

Well, the trials and tribulations of life in Curraheeland in the autumn I guess.

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October 23:

I am on Staff Duty tonite so I am awake and writing emails. The Staff Duty Officer is the person who is "in charge" of the BN (as you are the highest ranking conscious person on post) from 1600-0900 the next morning. You have a Staff Duty Non-Commissioned Officer and a private who is the radio operator. You sit in the Tactical Operations Center or TOC (pronounced 'Tock') and check email, watch movies, read, talk, work on reports or whatever and wait for anything to happen. We get called when folks get hurt or sick in the night, try to commit suicide, we handle Red Cross messages (like when someone's Mom is in the hospital). We also are always monitoring the Brigade net listening for the message that its time for us to go to war.

We receive alert messages every once in a while (almost always practice alerts). We have a long sequence of events to complete within 6 hours. If we were to receive a real war warning, in six hours time we would upload over 600 men and ALL their equipment, break open and upload our warstock of ammo move off this base and then destroy the entire facility. The base destruction plan is actually pretty neat. Very ingenious, involves lots of gasoline and thermite grenades. We try to hold off on that step, especially in the winter, we do that prematurely and it will be long cold winter.

In a real alert they would make things easier on us. We would evacuate the JSA (see my email on CPT Bonifas) and then Air Assault the line companies south of the river to free up our trucks. The field trains (trucks and trailers full of our gear) and Delta Company (armed Humvees) would roll south across the bridge and link up with the line companies in a designated Assembly Area.

It's starting to get cold here. It is real cold outside right now. Not freezing but come 4 AM its gonna be close to freezing. As I was walking between buildings earlier this evening I could hear the North Korean propaganda speakers from up near the Military Demarcation Line. Those North Koreans and their opera music...it drives one nuts. I guess that means it is doing its job, of course I thought NK propaganda was supposed to convince me to defect...

A bunch of us got the wits scared out of us up on Hill 229 recently ago. We were hiking up there to get a good view for pictures (229 overlooks the DMZ, the ROKs use it as an Observation Post). And there were all these blue tags sticking out of the road ahead, sticking out of little depressions in the ground and there were mine markers on the side of the road as usual but these had the lethal red arrow pointed IN toward the road rather than OUT toward the fields. So we waited a few minutes, motionless to let our respiration and heart-rate slow down a bit and then took pictures of ourselves standing in a minefield (careful not to move) and then carefully walked back the way we came.

It turns out we were never in any danger. We were not in a mine field. That is where they would put the mines in if the balloon went up, to block the road. The problem is that once the winter sets in the ground will be too hard to dig so they will not be able to emplace the mines. So they dig the holes ahead of time in fair weather and put blue plugs in the holes to keep them from collapsing. If they need to emplace the mines they pull out the inert plug and replace it with the real mine. Still, nothing better to get your heart pounding in the morning.

That ranks up there with meeting President Carter and watching dozens of ROK Army soldiers singing "We Are The Champions" for most memorable moment in Korea.

November 2:

Winter has arrived late but with a vengeance here in Korea. The predictions of snow on Halloween never panned out but it is cold enough that it freezes every night. One benefit is that it is very clear this time of year so you have great views of the surrounding countryside. From the hill that the North Of The River Inn (The NOTRI is the only Bar/club/restaurant type thing we have at Greaves) is located on you can see into North Korea and also down south. To the north is the forbidding looking mountains of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). The mountains tower high into the air, not the Rockies but still impressive. They are devoid of vegetation and have snow on them for much of the year.

To the south, in the Imjin river valley, is the town of Munsan. Munsan is about 5 km south of The Imjin River and has several Army installations including Camp Gary Owen, home of 4-7 Cav which is the 2nd Infantry Division's cavalry squadron. Camp Giant is also in Munsan. Despite the name Giant is very small and is home to A CO, 1-506 IN (my unit). As a historical note, Camp Giant is almost the exact center of drop zone used by the 187th Parachute Infantry Regiment when it jumped into Korea during one of the epic battles of the war.

5 km east of Munsan is a series of steep hills and valleys. One of those hills is known as Gloster Hill. During the Spring of 1951, The 29th UK Div was defending this sector of the battlefield. They were attacked by overwhelming

NK forces. All the regiments were forced back except 1 BN, Royal Gloucestershire Regiment. They stood fast on their hill as the other units fell back. They were quickly cut off and surrounded. They fought off repeated NK attacks, inflicting tremendous casualties on the enemy (they were in a tight perimeter, good fire concentration, at the top of a hill, slows the enemy in the kill zone). Eventually ammo consumption and casualties made it obvious that they could no longer hold the hill. The BN commander ordered that all personnel try to break out of the perimeter and attempt to infiltrate back to friendly lines, a desperate maneuver. Those too badly wounded to move would have to be left on the hill. Several medics and the BN Chaplain volunteered to stay with the wounded.

Of the 600 man BN less than 300 survived to attempt the break out. Less than 10 would make it to friendly lines. None of the wounded, medics or the Chaplain were ever found. Today there is a monument to the Glosters on the hill. Once a year in April, the survivors of the Royal Gloucestershire Regiment come to Gloster Hill commemorate the battle.

This is a land full of history. These are just historical sites from a period of three years of war. There were also countless border incursions since the war ended. 7000 South Korean soldiers and sailors have died in border skirmishes since the armistice, that works out to almost 150 per year (and does not count Americans killed like CPT Bonifas who I mentioned a couple of weeks ago). Roughly 1 ROK soldier killed every three days.

There are many other historic events from further back in time. Most historic sites are unmarked, the country is full of cemeteries, old battlefields, temples and the like. They can't recognize them all or there would not be much Korea to live in. If you are interested in the Korean War I suggest T.R. Ferenbach's "This Kind of War." It was written in the 60s but remains one of the best histories of The Korean War. Korea is a fascinating place to visit, I wish I didn't live here though.

November 12:

I went to the embassy the other day to get my passport. It started out with a Homeric Odyssey of sort with me travelling by Bus, Train, Subway and Taxi cab to get there. I find it guarded by a company plus of ROK police with submachine guns and body armor. They also must have gotten word that there was going to be a riot or something because there was about two hundred cops with riot gear (mask, shields and four foot long beat down sticks) disembarking about 6 buses that had chicken wire over the windows so you can't chuck grenades and shit in the bus. So I moved quickly to the gate so I could enter the embassy and found out it was closed for lunch. So I sat outside the embassy and looked around nervously hoping any rioters were at lunch also until they admitted me at one o'clock. Finally I get it all straightened out.

Tis the season of the planting of mines also. The rice paddies and fields are all harvested and drained in preparation for the winter, so the ROKs are putting mines in a lot of the farm fields. The idea is that the NK Army wants to attack in the winter when the fields are all frozen and drained (nothing is more ridiculous than a fifty ton tank trying to drive across a flooded field in the summer). So the ROK Army plants mines in the fields in the autumn and will dig them up in the spring shortly before the planting. So they grow rice in the summer and mines in the winter, talk about efficient agriculture.

I had some stuff called Kimchi Soup today. Its great stuff. It is a soup served in a clay pot. It has some small pieces of meat (unknown type), pieces of tofu, kimchi and onions in a spicy soup broth. It is served while it is still boiling, and has kimchi and sweet potato as side dishes. Great stuff, makes you sweat though. Well you all take it easy, have a good Thanksgiving I will be at Air Assault school for the next couple of weeks so I will not be sending out much after WED.

November 28:

Well, I have successfully completed the Army's 10 day Air Assault school. We started on zero day with 283 candidates and 125 of us graduated. They call it "The ten toughest days in the army" I don't know if that is the case but it was my ten toughest days.

Besides punishing physical activities like long forced marches, runs, push-ups and flutter kicks; Air Assault was broken into three phases. In the first phase they taught us Combat Assault, which is the typical using helicopters to move troops around the battlefield (typical use in Vietnam). This included marking and controlling Pick-up Zones (PZs) and Landing Zones (LZs), calling in Aero-MEDEVAC, aircraft familiarization and planning considerations for Combat Assaults.

Phase II was the Sling Load phase. We learned how to rig, inspect, hook-up, disconnect and derig vehicles and equipment to be suspended beneath helicopters so we can air assault in oversized gear. This was very demanding academically

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and required a tremendous attention to detail to ensure the loads were safe. The capstone to this was actually hooking a load up to a CH-47 Chinook helicopter. You stand on top of the load (in our case a Humvee) and the helicopter hovers mere feet above your head so you can attach the sling legs to the cargo hooks beneath the helicopter. Very windy.

Phase III was Rappel phase. We learned the basics of military rappelling, Knots, swiss seats and all that stuff. Then it was off to a 60-foot tower to practice rappels dozens of time. We practiced with and without combat equipment. Rappelling with combat gear definitely speeds your descent down the rope. The culmination of this phase was two 90-foot rappels from a hovering UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter one with gear one without gear. The one without combat load was outstanding, I had a lot of fun. With combat gear is a nightmare. Your own body weight, plus your gear, plus the down draft of the rotors meant you had to break as soon as you got out of the bird and you still drop in near freefall most of the way to the ground. I fell 70 feet before I could break to a speed that was good for hitting the ground. I would not mind avoiding combat load rappels in the future.

The final event of the school was a road march. Full combat gear, heavy rucksack, weapon, helmet, boots, Load Bearing Vest and the like for 12 miles in 3 hours. Add to that the temperature during the march never climbed above 28 degrees, it was a long march in your mind. At the end though we limped across the finish line and tried not to pass out during the award ceremony where they gave us our wings.

I am happy to have passed, it was a demanding course: it required me to overcome a fear of heights, apply myself academically, show strong attention to detail, and be physically fit. So that was my last 10 days, exciting huh?

December 4:

Woohoo! I am on leave!

Officially and legally clear of Army life for two weeks I am writing you from sunny Australia. It does not smell like garlic and human feces, I don't have to watch for minefields and everyone speaks English! Don't get me wrong, I love Korea in its own way but was I ready for a break!

Patti and I are in Sydney right now at a wonderful hotel that was VERY reasonably priced. So good in fact I half expect to find out that in the fine print of our papers I expect to find our permission to share the room with thirty Vietnamese boat people or something. At first glance Sydney looked like it was kinda cleared out, not busy. Then I realized that it was simply not South Korea. The Republic Of Korea is a crowded noisy place and a town with space aplenty took me by surprise. We visited the Australian natural history museum, the Sydney Cathedral, the Maritime museum and the famed Sydney Opera House. It is outstanding so far but we are plotting our escape to the wilds already. The only aborigines I have seen were driving taxis and the only Kangaroos I have seen were stuffed and in the Natural History Museum.

The Australians are into their sports in a big way. In one day one of their boxers lost an important fight and several sports team suffered crushing defeats, they received great newspaper space including opinion pieces that are shockingly similar to our "moving on with our lives after Sept. 11" bits.

The papers also delight in reporting bizarre accidents. There was a report of a man injured after dropping a running chainsaw on his leg. The paper took great relish in using the doctors verbatim description of the man's injuries, a "chunky laceration". Gotta love the Aussies.

I watched some cricket today. It is impossible to figure out what the heck the rules are. There is an entire vernacular of words that go with cricket and if you do not know them forget it. It wont make a damn bit of sense to you.

There are about 30 bars and restaurants in 3 blocks of the hotel and the opera house and its environs are within walking distance of the hotel. We can get french, italian, turkish/lebanese, chinese, japanese, korean, thai all right around us. The bars are phenomenal, with a selection that blows away most bars in the US and Korea.

I must mention though that the Seoul Hilton has a tremendous bar. I had a strange Hunter S. Thompson moment sitting in the bar of the Seoul Hilton drinking Singapore Slings till the wee hours of the morning. Well I must be going, I am at an internet cafe and the nightlife calls. Hope you are all well, maybe I will go out tonight in search of the constellations and check out this crazy southern hemisphere thing. Oh and no I cant prove I am south of the equator, the toilet flushes straight down without swirling, I cant check the direction it is swirling (for you Simpsons fans).

December 9:

Greetings from Byron Bay, New South Wales;

Patti and I are in Byron Bay NSW which is 13 hours by train north along the east coast of Australia. Byron Bay is the Eastern most point on mainland Australia. It is a kind of hippy counterculture hangout. There is a commune here that has been running since the 1960s and the whole town is pretty laid back. Most of the people here are under the age of 25. Backpackers and teenagers on holiday.

The beach is gorgeous, I had a lot of fun getting battered about by the waves and body surfing. The restaurants are outstanding and cheap. Patti and I have become regulars at the "Take a Walk on the Wild Side" noodle bar.

We have been staying in a backpacker's hostel. Our first night was in a dorm with ten other people that cost us about \$13 american. Now we have a double room for \$25 American per night.

There are a LOT of aging hippy types here. It makes it a very friendly and laid back town. Backpackers and hippies make a good combo. The backpacker's life is built on trust since they often cannot guarantee the security of their belongings in the hostels and along the way they must be trusting in the goodness of their hiking companions, people who offer them rides and that they will be able to find SOMEWHERE to stay in a town where they have no reservations or anything. Many backpackers are European kids that have checked out of the system for a while. Backpacking is a very cheap existence and they amass some money and spend 6 months just traveling and enjoying life. When they get short on cash they pick a cheap place to stay and get a job for a while, then move on. Most of the hippies here are showing their age, they have spent thirty years barefoot under the intense Australian sun smoking marijuana. I guess it takes a toll on you. They are nice enough people though.

So in summary in 24 hours I have been bodysurfing, swimming, beach-walking, hiking, been to cool and interesting restaurants, asked to buy marijuana in a public toilet lit with blue light to make it hard for Heroin users to find their veins, seen cliffs, shipwrecks, sea critters, live bands, nude beaches, a pro-hemp rally, lawn bowling (a mindless British sport of some sort that is almost as inscrutable as Cricket), people hang-gliding and more.

Cheers Mate;

December 23:

Hey folks;

It's the holiday season up here in Curraheeland just like everywhere else. That time of year when the men of the 1-506 confront that they are on an isolated post where the NKs are far closer to them than their families (and the bastards still don't invite us around for eggnog). 'Tis the season where we put up XMAS trees, exchange small gifts and write letters to Santa reminding him not to land his sleigh in the mine field. There is some snow on the ground, which is nice, gives it a festive air. Its also cold here, I don't mean that "hi I am in WI" cold. I am talking that fresh from Siberia cold (literally).

I am the Officer of the Guard tonite. So I am responsible for leading forth the platoon of joes that are guarding Greaves tonite (well really I just look important and let the NCOs run it). We have live ammo and stuff so it is interesting (I have seen some of these guys drunk before so I am a little scared). We rotate their duties so no one spends to long standing out in the cold. We have guards on the gates, a roving guard who wanders around with their Night Vision Goggles and the rest form a Quick Reaction Force to respond to any incidences. They pull a four-hour shift at one of the outside posts and then we send them in for four hours on QRF where they can stay warm and get some rack time. I will get off at noon on XMAS eve.

My XMAS plans revolve around sleeping, eating and perhaps some moderate imbibage with some of my fellow LTs.

I hope the season finds you all well and safe. I hope you and yours have a merry Christmas.