

UNC student soldiers share views from Iraq

Aim to serve nation, help Iraqi citizens

BY ADAM RODMAN
STAFF WRITER

In October 2003, UNC sophomore Chris Arndt was in line with his friends at Southpoint Cinemas when he received a phone call from his Army Reserve unit — he was going to Iraq.

"I knew for a while that I was probably going to get deployed," he stated in an e-mail sent from Iraq. "It doesn't take a genius to figure out that the Army is stretched thin, and they're using everyone they have."

"So really, I was relieved to finally know something for certain instead of wondering what could happen."

At least four students have withdrawn from the University since

the beginning of the semester to serve in the military, said Emily Gay, a unit coordinator in the Office of the University Registrar.

Arndt, who serves in the 227th Transportation Company, said he joined the Army ROTC and U.S. Army Reserve to help the country he deeply loves.

"I also wanted a way for tremendous personal growth, and I knew that the high-paced, stressful nature of the military would challenge me," he wrote.

Rafael Barbosa, a UNC sophomore and veteran of the Bosnian war in 1999 who also served in Afghanistan as a national guardsman with the first and 130th

Aviation Regiment, joined for similar reasons.

"I wanted to give something back to society," he said. "I feel like my four years were as important as one piece of one giant puzzle."

Although Arndt said he and the other soldiers are mostly well off, the mental stress is the hardest part of serving in Iraq.

The most difficult part of shipping out, Arndt said, wasn't fear of a foreign culture or of working under enemy fire.

"Leaving school was the toughest part and as I speak ... now 7,000 miles away, UNC is what I miss most," he wrote.

UNC's meticulously kept buildings stand in stark contrast to the war-ravaged Iraqi landscape. The soldiers witnessed firsthand what decades of fighting and a repressive regime have done to the country.

"There is evidence of conflict everywhere," stated sophomore Jason Barber in an e-mail. He is serving with the 252nd Armor Regiment in the Kurdish region of northern Iraq.

"The countryside is covered with berms, trenches and fighting positions, which are a constant reminder of what this country has been through."

Buildings and people throughout the nation still carry war scars, he said. He has seen the remains of entire Kurdish villages that were slaughtered during Saddam Hussein's reign.

Despite the damage to the country and the tense military situation, Arndt said helping the Iraqis is one of the best parts of his deployment.

"In many ways, they're just like us," he wrote. "They want the same things in life — peace for the family, a hope for the future, a better life."

Barber's experiences with the Iraqis were equally positive, especially with the children.

"The kids love candy, play soccer and would talk your ear off if given half a chance," he said.

And amid that chatter were thanks for the soldiers' help in rebuilding the Iraqis' fallen cities.

Still, Arndt realizes that much remains unfinished in Iraq.

"We have lots of work to do, and the Iraqi people have decades of work to undo the scars of a repressive regime and years of war, including this one," Arndt wrote.



COURTESY OF JASON BARBER

Jason Barber, a UNC sophomore in Army ROTC, shows his school spirit while he poses on a mountain range in northern Iraq. Barber was called to active duty with the 252nd Armor Regiment in August 2003.

Where average Iraqis support the efforts to rebuild, the insurgents are doing their best to disrupt this work, Arndt said.

He recalled a man who joined the Iraqi National Guard so he could have a weapon with which to protect his family. Students from his daughter's school waved at an American convoy, and a group of insurgents threatened to blow up the school and kill all the children if it ever happened again.

"The people we are fighting aren't freedom fighters or minutemen, they're criminals and thugs," he wrote. "I connected with that Iraqi man and the fact he had such a love for his people and his family."

But whether the situation in Iraq is actually improving is up for debate, senior Emran Huda stated in an e-mail. Huda is serving in the Diyala Province in Iraq.

"The last few weeks have been anxious," he wrote. "I'm not sure if things have gotten better or worse here, there seem to be enough events to support both claims."

The soldiers stress that the actions taken by insurgents shouldn't be viewed as representative of the general population, and many believe the American media sensationalizes the situation in Iraq.

"Leaving school was the toughest part and as I speak ... now 7,000 miles away, UNC is what I miss most."

CHRIS ARNDT, UNC SOPHOMORE, U.S. ARMY RESERVE, 227TH TRANSPORTATION COMPANY

"I know good news doesn't sell like bad news does, but I rarely ever see any good news on this struggle," Arndt wrote.

The media fails to show how much the Iraqis want the coalition in their country, Barber said.

"After all, if 25 million Iraqis wanted the 150,000 coalition soldiers to leave, we wouldn't be here now," he wrote. "The media shows the bombings but none of the building."

As for the UNC soldiers, they want to return to pulling all-nighters and writing papers once their tours of duty are over, but their future plans could be interrupted by a call to serve again.

"The Army is stressed right now, and many people are gearing up for a second tour here," Arndt wrote. "I think that many people will return here for a second time, and if it happens to me, then I'll just do the best job I can."

Barber's wife, Joy, said she has

feared her husband being called back to duty since his first day. "It's weighing heavily on my mind," she said. "He expects he'll get called up again in the next five years. We'll have to put off having kids."

Despite the violence, the struggles he's seen and the threat of being called again for active duty, Arndt said he sees improvement in Iraq.

"Every day, I see reasons for hope in this country and the cause."

Contact the Features Editor at features@unc.edu.

The Daily Tar Heel

P.O. Box 3257, Chapel Hill, NC 27515
Michelle Jarboe, Editor, 962-4086
Advertising & Business, 962-1163
News, Features, Sports, 962-0245

One copy per person; additional copies may be purchased at The Daily Tar Heel for \$25 each.

© 2004 DTH Publishing Corp.
All rights reserved.

uniquities
fashion forward boutiques

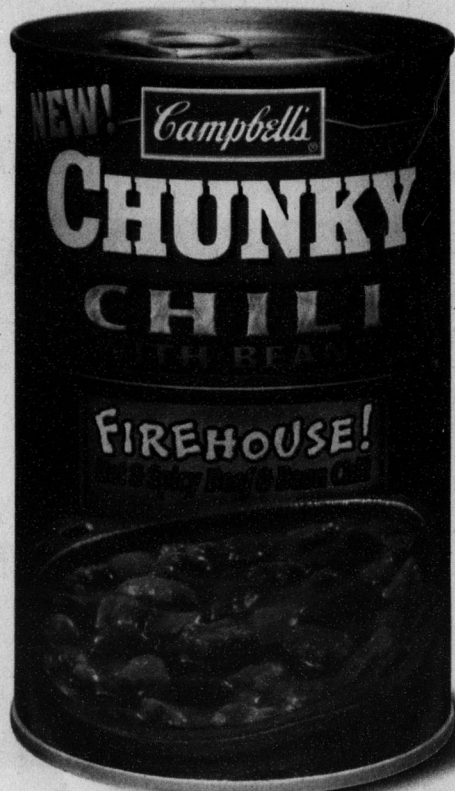
theory
juicy couture
citizens of humanity

Chapel Hill
452 West Franklin St
919.933.4007

Raleigh
Cameron Village
919.832.1234

open every day
www.uniquities.com

CHECK OUT THE NEW HOTTIE.



NEW CAMPBELL'S® CHUNKY CHILI.

JAGDISH BHAGWATI
In Defense of Globalization

Friday, November 12, 2004 • 4:00 p.m.
Cobb Theater • Sonja Haynes Stone Center for Black Culture and History
Free and open to the public.

The lecture will be preceded by a special performance by
photographer and National Public Radio storyteller Jesse Kalisher.

Jagdish Bhagwati is University Professor at Columbia University and a senior fellow in international economics at the Council on Foreign Relations. He is one of the world's most important and engaging scholars of international trade and immigration and a leader in the fight for freer trade. A prolific author, Bhagwati has published more than 300 articles and 50 volumes. He writes frequently for *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Financial Times*, as well as reviews for *The New Republic* and *The Times Literary Supplement*.

Jagdish Bhagwati's lecture at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill is organized by the University Center for International Studies as part of its Distinguished Speakers Series.

For more information, please contact Kim Glenn at kim_glenn@unc.edu or at 919/843-2403.
Campus parking information is available at www.unc.edu/visitors.