

A LETTER TO MY CHILDREN: GLOSSARY OF TERMS



Dear Quinn, Regan, Patrick and Tommy,

I want to wish you all a very merry Christmas, to tell you how much I miss you all, how proud I am of each of you and to tell you how much I am looking forward to a family hug when I get back from Iraq. I'm sending you this letter telling you about one of my days this week so that you can better understand some of the things that I am doing while I am away from you all and from Mom. On Tuesday, December 11th, I got up at two O'clock in the morning in order to go on a mission with some of my Marines. On this day, I was working with our 3rd platoon who has the call sign, which is what they are called on the radio by other units, of Carnivore 3. Our other platoons are Carnivore 1

and Carnivore 2. The Company has a call sign starting with the letter "C" because our unit is "C" Company, 4th Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, and it makes it easier for other units to know who they might be talking to on the radio if you use the same alphabet letter as your unit name ("C" Company). However, when a platoon is just speaking to themselves, the first platoon is the "Red" platoon, the second platoon is the "White" platoon, and the third platoon is the "Blue" platoon. Get it...Red, White and Blue? And then each of the vehicles is given a different number so you would hear, for example, "Red 1 this is Red 5" on the radio. Each of our 3 "Carnivore" platoons has about 50 Marines and is led by an Officer (called the "Platoon Commander"), 2 being Captains and 1 a 1st Lieutenant, and a Staff

I.E.D.s (*Improvised Explosive Device*)

S.V.B.I.E.D.s (*Suicide Vehicle Born IEDs*)

Sergeant (called the “Platoon Sergeant”). Boys, ask Mom to tell you what the word Carnivore means. Since I am the Executive Officer of the unit, which means that I am the second in command, I often get to go out with one of our three platoons in order to observe how they are doing and to see if there are any things that they could do differently that would help them accomplish their missions a little better, faster, or safer. The Commanding Officer, called the C.O., Major Campbell, goes out on days that I don’t go out since we always try to have one of us at our headquarters, called the C.O.C. or Combat Operations Center, at all times in case something happens that requires either he or I to be contacted, either by one of our platoons (because we will often have two platoons doing different missions at the same time) or by our higher headquarters, because something significant or out of the ordinary occurred. An example of this could be one of the platoons finding a bomb and they need us to tell other Marines in the area and all of the Commanders of different units about it so they can look out for bombs that were put in places similar to the one that was found.

Anyway, the Marines are all on their vehicles at 2:30am which in the Marine Corps is called “Zero Two Thirty” (0230). We don’t use “am” or “pm”. We use what is called a “24 hour clock” so that, for example, 11pm is, in our language, called “Twenty Three Hundred” (2300). This is to make sure that no one ever gets confused whether you are talking about the morning or the afternoon since, like today, we are just as likely to be working in the middle of the night as in the middle of the day. The Marines in Carnivore 3 spend about an hour making sure that their 10 vehicles, which we shorten to “10 Vix” and 50 Marines, which we shorten to “50 Pax” (short for passengers) are all ready to go. We use special abbreviations like this for many words because it is easier to say or to write “Vix” or “Pax” than it is to say or write “Vehicles” or “Passengers”. The Platoon Commander of Carnivore 3 (Captain Perney) and HIS second in Command (Staff Sergeant Walker) gave classes the day before, called op orders (for Operation Order) to explain to all of the Marines exactly where we will be going, when we will be going there, what we will be bringing with us, what we will be doing both on the way as well as when we get to various places, and who is responsible for doing lots of different things along the way. Then Carnivore 3 spent hours, out in a field, on base, doing rehearsals. This means that they practice, kind of like you



GEAR:

Boots, uniform, weapons and ammunition, Including “PPE” or Personal Protective Equipment

Weight: 70 pounds

Photo by:
MSgt. D.D. Zenoni



Preparation for the current mission



The oldest gunner in Iraq



On our way on a road in Fallujah

“Corporal Paur drives me and my crew around in a vehicle called an ‘MRAP’ which stands for ‘Mine Resistant Ambush Protected’ ”

guys do at soccer practice, all of the things that they need to know how to do well to do their jobs here without getting hurt or killed or, even worse, doing something wrong and getting another Marine hurt or killed. They practice what they will do if one of their “Vix” breaks down on the road. They practice what they will do if they get attacked by mortars, snipers, road side bombs called I.E.D.s (Improvised Explosive Device), bombs in cars or trucks called V.B.I.E.D.s (Vehicle Born IEDs), or bombs in cars or trucks that are driven by terrorists who try to drive them into you and then blow themselves up called S.V.B.I.E.D.s (Suicide Vehicle Born IEDs). They also, more importantly, practice all of the things that they need to do to keep people from attacking them. We like to be what is called a “hard target”. This means that if terrorists, or even guys that think that they might want to be terrorists, were to look at you while you were doing your mission, and consider, maybe, attacking you, you would look so well trained and even a little bit scary, so that they would believe that if they tried to attack you, you would kill them all. This is something that Marines practice doing, and do really well, because if the terrorists think that they will be killed immediately if they attack us and that we look so well trained and scary that they probably won’t even hurt any Marines before we kill them, most terrorists won’t even try to attack Marines. That is what being a hard target means.

When I travel with one of the platoons, I bring my own vehicle with Marines from MY platoon which is called “Headquarters Platoon”. Headquarters Platoon is made up of all of the Marines that aren’t in 1st, 2nd, or 3rd Platoon and has the X.O., meaning me, as its Platoon Commander. The Marines in Headquarters Platoon are the men who work really hard to keep things running all of the time. They are the Marines who keep the radios and computers from breaking down. They are the Marines who fix the Vix when they break or are about to. They are the Marines who make sure that all of the supplies that you need to be in combat are ordered and delivered. They are the Marines who fix the weapons when they need to be repaired. Headquarters Platoon also has a second in command and his name is Staff Sergeant Genao. The second in command of a platoons job is called being the “Platoon Sergeant”, which I mentioned before, which means that he is the senior sergeant in the platoon and does the majority of the stuff needed to get a platoon through its work day, whether that means going on a mission, planning to go on a mission soon, or doing something that doesn’t seem necessarily related to a specific mission but is absolutely part of being a Marine. An example of this last part is that the platoon sergeant is given an ongoing job by the platoon commander to ensure that all weapons and special equipment that have serial numbers on them, called serialized gear, are never lost and are always accounted for. That means that the person who has been given responsibility for, say, a radio, always either has it with him or knows that it was put in a secure place and that bad guys haven’t gotten hold of it. You could see how if we were talking about a

machine gun, which is serialized, and bad guys were to get a hold of it, it would be a bad thing. The “call sign” for headquarters platoon vehicles (“Vix”), instead of “Carnivore” is “Black”, when we are talking to each other, since Headquarters Platoon doesn’t actually have a full platoon go outside the wire at any one time and using “Black” instead of “Carnivore” actually helps keep that straight. The second in command of a company, which is what I am, is referred to as the “5” of a unit, which makes my call sign “Black 5”. The C.O.’s call sign, for similar reasons, is “Black 6”. When speaking to other units, though, the C.O. is Carnivore 6 and I am Carnivore 5. The Marines who ride in a particular vehicle are called its “crew”. I am the “VC” or Vehicle Commander of a vehicle that is called “Black 5” and this particular Vehicle is called “Black 5” because I am in it. If I happened to change Vix, then the Vix that I moved to would become “Black 5”. I know the call sign thing can be a little confusing.

I have a driver whose name is Corporal Paur and a gunner whose name is Corporal Easley. Corporal Paur drives me and my crew around in a vehicle called an “MRAP” which stands for “Mine Resistant Ambush Protected” and which we pronounce “EM RAP”. The “Mine Resistant” part of the MRAP name has proven to be true for us since, a few weeks ago, one of Carnivore 2’s Vix had an I.E.D blow up right under it. The vehicle was damaged and had to be towed in but the crew was all O.K. We also use other types of vehicles in combination with our MRAPs.

At 0230 on the day of the mission, I met my crew at the vehicle and we got it ready to go out for what we expected to be somewhere between 12 and 18 hours. That means we needed to make sure that we had full fuel tanks, all of the right radios, food and water, weapons and ammunition and what is called our “PPE” or Personal Protective Equipment. As you guys have seen in the photos that I have sent you, Marines in Iraq wear a whole lot of stuff when they go off of our bases which is referred to as “going outside the wire”. This is equipment that is meant to help keep you alive, uninjured and able to keep fighting in the event of IEDs or some other type of attack occurring. We always wear some type of glasses or goggles to keep our eyes as safe as we can from little pieces of flying metal or debris. At night we have ones with clear lenses and most people during the day, including me, wear dark lenses since, this being a desert, it is usually very sunny. Other types of PPE include your helmet, your body armor, your gloves and your uniform which is a flight suit like a pilot of a Marine helicopter wears. The flight suit and the gloves are made out of special material that doesn’t catch on fire very easily and that is supposed to give you extra time to get out of your vehicle if an IED blows up under it and it catches on

fire. The body armor is the big vest that you wear over your upper body. The latest version, which we have, goes on over your head, has a bunch of special loops for you to fasten other gear on to it and has the ability to stop a machine gun bullet if it hits you in the chest or the back or the sides. We also carry rifles, pistols, lots of bullets, knives, first aid kits and other things that a particular mission might require. When I add up all of my PPE and other gear, including boots, uniform, weapons and ammunition, it weighs about 70 lbs. That is just about the same as carrying an average 10 year old on your back all of the time and is one of the reasons why Marines have to be in such good shape and why I always go to the gym when I am home.

We get a big machine gun out of our armory, which is the place where we store our machine guns, various other special weapons and other serialized gear, and put it up on top of the vehicle. At various times we will use either an M2 .50 cal or an M240 Golf. They fire, respectively, linked belts of .50 caliber bullets and 7.62 mm bullets. On my vehicle, Corporal Easley, the gunner, sits on top, inside an armored area called the turret and looks for things that are dangerous or suspicious. Being on top of the vehicle, really high up, the gunner can see better than the guys inside the vehicle and the vehicle crew relies on him to keep them safe from bad guys. In October, I assigned myself as the gunner on a convoy in order to better understand what it is like to perform that job. It was not easy keeping watch on everything that could possibly be a threat, having to decide if it really was a threat and constantly being prepared to shoot either people or vehicles that did not obey your instructions and signals to stay clear of your vehicle or other Marine vehicles.

When I go outside the wire, I like to bring some other Marines from Headquarters along with us. Since the only vehicle crews in our Headquarters platoon are Black 6 and Black 5, all of the other Marines in Headquarters don’t have their own crews and come on missions with the C.O. or myself on a rotating basis. That lets all of the Marines get off of our base and see various other parts of Iraq which, in addition to seeing how the Carnivore platoons are doing on their missions and, thereby, maybe coming up with an idea on how to improve something, it helps the Headquarters Platoon Marines have a better understanding of what is going on and which, in and of itself, is an important thing that we call “Situational Awareness” or SA. In actuality though, the majority of American military personnel in Iraq have jobs these days that rarely, if ever, have them leaving the bases and going outside the wire with the exceptions of their movements from outside Iraq onto a base or possibly flying from base to base inside Iraq.

Around 0330, we board our vehicles, and do our radio checks to make sure that all of the crews can speak to each

I can not dial 911. There's no 11 on my phone

other and that all of the vehicles can communicate with the C.O.C. We then roll out of our compound and head toward the gate that allows you to leave Camp Fallujah and, officially, go outside the wire. Right before we drive out of the heavily guarded gate, however, all of the Vix stop, and all of the Marines, including the Marines up in the turrets of the Vix, load all of the rifles, pistols and machine guns. In the special language of Marines, this is called “Going to condition one” which means that all of your rifles and pistols have magazines of bullets inserted into them and then bullets are loaded into the weapons firing chambers. Once the safety is clicked off, the weapons are ready to fire. In the case of the machine guns, sometimes referred to as crew served weapons, which fire belts of bullets linked together and not magazines, they are loaded as well.

Now that everyone is ready, all of the Vix go through the gate, past the guards, out onto the roads of Iraq, and the mission actually starts. Everything prior to this would be called the prep phase and it is incredibly important. All of the route planning, the op order, the rehearsals, and the infamous PCCs and PCIs (Pre-Combat Checks and Pre-Combat Inspections) that we do are what determines how successful the mission will be. I believe that a great analogy can be drawn from football to warfare. I have always believed that almost all football games are won or lost, not during the game itself, but during the preparation/practice phase. It is, in my opinion, the same here.

This mission has Carnivore 3 escorting and providing security for Marines who are guards at what you would call a jail (here it is called an RDF or Regional Detention Facility) The detainees are Iraqis who have been caught doing things, such as letting terrorists store explosives at their houses, stealing things, or any of a variety of things that there are laws against in any safe and civilized society which is what Marines are helping Iraq become. Some of these men are being kept in custody in order to actually have a trial, much like might be done in our country, some just for further questioning like during an investigation, and some are on their way to a place that would be like a prison, because they have already been found guilty at a trial, and is called a “TIF” or Theatre Internment Facility. After leaving Camp Ramadi, we drive about 2 hours away to a big Army camp, called Camp Cropper, which is attached to the Baghdad International Airport which everyone calls “BIAP”. At BIAP, we go to the TIF, and the Marines who are actually guarding the detainees (remember: Carnivore 3 is providing security for the guards, as well as for the detainees for whom the guards are responsible) turn the detainees over to the guards at the TIF for whatever purpose the Iraqi system has determined. After the detainees are brought into the TIF, other detainees are brought out and the guards take cus-

tody of them. These new detainees are going to be brought to one of our next stops on the mission. Incidentally, while we are waiting for the new group to be brought out, we go over to the large dining facility at Camp Cropper to have lunch. A place where you are served food in the Marine Corps is called, in Marine speak, a “chow hall”. The chow hall at Camp Cropper is an interesting place to eat for several reasons. One reason is that every time I have been there, we are the only Marines there amongst many, many hundreds of people who are wearing uniforms of the U.S. Army, the U.S. Air Force, the U.S. Navy as well as many people in military and police uniforms from several other countries as well as a whole bunch of civilians, both men and women, who work there doing various things. We know that we are the only Marines there because we are the only ones wearing the flight suits that I mentioned earlier, and no one is wearing Marine Corps camouflage which is really easy to differentiate from the Army and the Air Force versions, and so it is real easy to find where your group is sitting, if you get separated, which is pretty easy to do because one of the other interesting things about eating there is that the chow hall is about 15 times larger then the one in which we normally eat at Camp Fallujah. The Marines actually joke about eating at another base like this as “going out to dinner”.

The new set of detainees are then loaded onto large armored trucks and Carnivore 3 leaves BIAP for a two hour drive to the city of Fallujah which is just a few miles from Camp Fallujah where we started our day. When we arrive at what is called “FIPS”, which stands for Fallujah Iraqi Police Station, we unload many of the detainees that we brought from Camp Cropper. Those that are unloaded are either released back into Iraqi society, having served their sentences, or are simply in transit to some other segment of the Iraqi system of justice.

FIPS is in the middle of the city of Fallujah which is where the most difficult and intense combat in this war has occurred. Do you all remember when we went to that ceremony in Fresno about a year and a half ago where we saw the young Marine Sergeant (Sgt. Kraft) awarded a Navy Cross? He fought in Fallujah and, as I recall, his Navy Cross was awarded for actions that occurred in Fallujah almost exactly 3 years ago today. Fallujah is, today, a much more peaceful place, because the Marines have worked very hard to make it so and because the Iraqi people have decided that the terrorists are really bad, evil people and that Iraq will be much more peaceful, safe, and prosperous if they help the Marines fight against them. That is why so many Iraqis have joined the Iraqi Army or become Iraqi Policemen.

After we leave FIPS, we have one more stop, and that is to drop off the remaining few detainees at a base called Camp Habbaniyah that is about 30 minutes away. The trip to Camp

Habbaniyah takes you over the Euphrates River and through some interesting areas where people have stores and homes and, generally, just seem to live normal lives. That being said, I still give commands to my Gunner, Corporal Easley, to keep his eyes on specific things that just might be dangerous. And I know that all of the VC's in all of the Carnivore 3 Vix are doing the exact same thing as I am doing.

C Company has been lucky since we got to Iraq in September. Don't forget, though, that a great definition of "luck" is: "When preparation meets opportunity". No one has gotten seriously hurt and no one has been killed. We've been shot at, we've been mortared, we've found IEDs before they went boom, and we found one the hard way. We've even had a few opportunities to shoot back. We've done over 60 missions that ranged from less than 2 hours to more than a week. I was once outside the wire for 5 consecutive days and nights manning, with Corporal Easley, a forward COC at a COP (Combat OutPost).

After arriving at Camp Habbaniyah, we dropped off the remaining detainees and headed back to Camp Fallujah, arriving in time for dinner. As with most of our missions, this one was uneventful and went according to plan. Start to finish the mission lasted 14 hours and covered 190 miles.

Semper Fidelis,
Dad

Captain T.P.Slatic USMCR

Executive Officer, C Company
4th Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion
Task Force MP
Camp Fallujah, Iraq



Quinn, Regan, Patrick, Tommy and Kim Slatic



Some Iraqi men at Habbaniyah



Typical mom and pop shops downtown



We pass the remains of many buildings

“I Still give commands to my Gunner, Corporal Easley, to keep his eyes on specific things that just might be dangerous.”