



Submitted photos



VAHS grad details experiences escorting Iraq convoys in blog

By Seth Joaag
United Newspaper Group

This June, Kyle Hausmann-Stokes boarded a crowded airplane toting a machine gun, an M-4 rifle, a 9-mm pistol, a couple knives and a pair of brass knuckles.

He wasn't the only one packing. As a member of the 1st battalion of the U.S. Army's 160th Infantry, Hausmann-Stokes, a 2001 graduate of Verona Area High School, was bound for Kuwait and eventually Iraq, where in recent months he's criss-crossed the battle-scarred country as a staff sergeant leading teams of armored gun trucks that provide security for supply convoys.

It's been an eye-opening experience for Hausmann-Stokes, an aspiring filmmaker who in February was featured in the *Verona Press* after he opted for active duty instead of starting film school at the University of Southern California. Since shipping out, he's tracked much of what he's seen on his blog at www.kylehs.com.

With little down time, he's only written three entries so far, but each provides a detailed glimpse of the war from a man who was born and raised in Verona.

Shortly after he first arrived in Kuwait, Kyle wrote on June 29 of getting acclimated to the desert:

"Try to imagine covering yourself in motor oil, working up a sweat, and then rolling around in the sand;



this should give you a good idea of what it is like to try and clean up after enduring the better part of the afternoon in a sand storm."

A month later, an entry told of the dangers of their mission.

"We are being hit pretty consistently every week or so," he wrote on July 29. "The worst flavor of (Improvised Explosive Device, or 'road-side bomb') is known as an EFP, or Explosively Formed Projectile, which ... consist of 2-inch-thick copper plates about the size of a dinner plate.

"While our space-age armor can withstand the blast of hundred-pound bombs, these EFPs are cutting through our trucks like butter."

In his blog, Kyle details learning of his first "KIA" (killed in action), when a turret gunner in an attached convoy died after his Humvee rolled in an accident. He also tells of being humbled by a 90-pound female Air Force member who fixed a broken-down truck while the Army guys cluelessly looked on.

Of navigating a convoy through Baghdad, Kyle writes:

"Weaving in and out of piles of rubble, mangled balls of barbed wire and craters in the road the size of a pool table kept my adrenaline level well above the 'scared stupid' marker. And none of this is helped by the fact that shady and suspicious characters hide behind any and every dark corner in sight.

Oh yeah, and while driving like your life depended on it (no pun intended), be sure not to hit one of the eight million stray dogs that like to cut in front of your truck when you least expect it."

His most recent entry, Oct. 6, also tells of a heart-thumping run-in with four insurgents who attempted to detonate an IED near a team of four gun trucks led by Kyle.

In that incident, one of Kyle's men noticed a pickup truck was "pacing" them on a busy road in southern Iraq. In short, the insurgents were reporting the convoy's speed to a triggerman ahead who was waiting to detonate an IED at just the right time,

Hausmann-Stokes wrote.

The ensuing encounter reveals both the intensity — and the appreciation for life — that day-to-day life in a combat zone can bring.

"Never again will I complain about sitting in (Los Angeles) traffic," said Hausmann-Stokes, who plans to resume film classes at the University of Southern California after his tour ends next year. "At least the dreaded 10 West isn't peppered with IED-filled potholes, trip wires, pressure plates, drive-by shooters or car bombs."

Despite the persistent dangers, Kyle, whose military buddies call him "Hollywood," said in an e-mail Monday that from his point of view, things are improving in Iraq.

"I can say without a doubt though that we are seeing progress," he said. "Whether it be acting on intelligence given to us by the locals or reading in the Stars and Stripes newspaper about another unit's successful mission accomplishment, it's clear to me that this is a very different and better place than it was just a few years ago."

"Unfortunately, most of these stories are ones you will never hear from the news media back in the states, and that is easily one of the most difficult parts about this job." Look for more on-the-ground updates from Kyle in future issues of the *Verona Press*.

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