

The *Atlantic Journal Constitution* published an article on 10 Dec 03 written by MAJ Fred Wellman titled "Soldier, sheik build friendship." It is a thoughtful piece on which to close this column.

"As I flew across the berm into Iraq on 23 March, my mind was full of questions about the battle ahead. Would our supplies reach us so deep in Iraq? Were our soldiers ready for the task ahead? Would we all make it out together? I could not have imagined that nearly a year later, I would be looking back fondly at time spent supervising school construction, mediating the release of detainees or sorting thousands of pounds of donated medicine, school supplies, and clothes. Yet those are the memories that crowd my head today.

"My war changed on 11 May. As a member of the 101st Airborne Division, I had moved steadily northward until arriving at an abandoned air base near Mosul. Shortly after our arrival, an old man from one of the nearby villages approached our checkpoint with a note in English asking for help with the water supply. I wrote back that we would come and see what we could do. On that day, I met Dr. Mohammed and found an unexpected brother. He is the sheik of his small village and had given up his medical practice to take over the leadership when his father passed away ten years ago.

"Speaking halting 'medical' English, he led us to his village, where we found a dusty sprawl of mud brick houses, hardscrabble farmland, sheep and a dry 1½-inch pipe coming from the base we now occupied. I was struck by the hard life of the people, but all they asked for was water. I went back to my leaders and asked for a chance to help. Within weeks the floodgates of civil assistance funds opened. What started out as an attempt to help one village has grown into a civil relief program spanning over 40 villages providing new schools, water, road construction, jobs, and a clinic. Throughout all of the work, this quiet, thoughtful man has helped me assist his people. He would take the time to try to make me understand the cultural nuances of a land alien to my own.

"With temperatures in the 120s throughout the summer, we would drive from village to village assessing their needs, eating a lot of sheep, and drinking gallons of tea. At every stop, Dr. Mohammed was at my side trying to help everyone in his region. I have watched this small village leader with natural charisma become the area leader selected to sit on the regional council and meet with the U.S. Central Command leader. He is the one man that anyone in need can go to for assistance.

"When I asked him one day why he didn't practice medicine, he said it was because he couldn't charge people. As a sheik, he didn't feel right having them give him money. Besides, the village simply could not afford to open a clinic.



1987—Braving the cold temperatures at Army–Navy in December: Jim Yacone and Preston Forchin with Preston's friend to the left.

So, one day I dropped on him that we wanted to build him a clinic—in his village. He was dumbfounded. All during lunch, he kept leaning over and saying, 'MAJ Wellman this would be very good.'

"A local contractor designed and built a three-room clinic, and it's outfitted with supplies from us and people back home who donated almost 2,000 lbs. of medical supplies, including bandages, a scale, medical equipment, wheelchairs, over-the-counter medicines, braces—you name it. Dr. Mohammed has never taken a single penny from us for personal gain, nor does he charge patients at this clinic. He does it for his people.

"As my tour draws to an end, I have hope for the future of Iraq because there are other leaders like him emerging. They take incredible personal risks to step up and lead for the good of their fellow Iraqis. Dr. Mohammed is not in it because it will make him rich or famous. All he wants is a chance to take care of his people and make a difference to people in this difficult area. He does it without regard to the seven different tribes or ethnic Kurds we have helped.

"When I leave Iraq, it will be with some sadness, as I have found so many of the people to be warm, kind, and funny. I know that a new Iraq is coming and that the supporters of the former regime are terrified of this new Iraq. The new Iraq will be a nation with hope—with freedom, with a chance to stop being afraid. This new Iraq will be one where power will come from contributions and not fear. It is an Iraq that is being born in our little slice of the country in the 23 schools we have built. It is being born through the 60 patients a day getting help in the new clinic. It is being built quietly and steadily by the man who calls me his brother and others like him who have the courage to stand in the face of terror, politics, doubt, and fear to make a difference to the people around them and let hope flourish one village at a time. I am proud to have been one small part of that beginning and proud to be called brother by a man of such courage."

Keep the updates and photos coming. We look forward to hearing from all in 2004.

—Donna & Ted

1988

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Greetings from **Bob Hamilton**, Ro Jackson '87, and Robert "Hoot" Gibson (AFA 1988), the "Service Academy Football" clique here at CENTCOMJ-5. **Lisa & Scott Strine** checked in from Cornwall, NY. Lisa is midway through her seventh year at the AOG. She enjoys helping alumni with various requests and enjoys her interaction with the cadets in her cadet company H-3 as well as the cadets on the cross-country and track teams. Last year, she served as OR for the track team during spring leave. Her two girls were a

w e l c o m e
sight after a week with 80 cadets in Anaheim, CA!

L i s a
caught up with **Andrea (Ford) Hodges**, **Caroline (Moore) France**, **Deanna (Bernard) O'Brien** a n d



1988—The Amberg family searching for Santa in Japan.

Angelika Schaefer during the 15th reunion. Andrea is enjoying the Houston area with her two children. Caroline is with Air Products in New Tripoli, PA. Deanna loves living and working in the Big Apple. Angelika is enjoying life, her consulting job, and her children in Sun Prairie, WI. Lisa hears from **Brenden & Leah (Conser) Scherr** often. They are loving life in Henderson,

NV. Another Eagle, **John Norton**, is setting up a mini reunion for the Eagles (E-3) in DC in March. For more information, e - m a i l <Eagle88-request@overpressure.com>.



1988—Lance Bagley tells Santa what he wants for Christmas.