The MIGHTY EIGHTH VOICE

News from around 8th Air Force

Vol V Issue 8 | Barksdale Air Force Base, Louisiana | September 2005

# Space Shuttle stops at Barksdale

Photo by Tech. Sgt. Robert Horstman

**Space Shuttle Discovery sits on the Barksdale Air Force Base, La., flightline Aug. 19. The shuttle stopped at Barksdale en route to Florida.**

*By Airman 1st Class Brandon Kusek*
2d Bomb Wing Public Affairs

Barksdale welcomed NASA and the Space Shuttle Discovery Space Transporta-tion System-114 during its ferry flight from Edwards Air Force Base, Calif., to the Kennedy Space Center, Fla.

This is the first time since the Columbia tragedy a shuttle has made a stop at Barksdale. Discovery is the third shuttle to stop at Barksdale while returning to the Kennedy Space Center. Columbia stopped to refuel in April 1982 and December 1990, and Atlantis stopped in March 2001. Columbia arrived once more to Barksdale in February 2003 after the tragic accident that destroyed it.

The shuttle, piggy-backed onto a modified Boeing 747, left Edwards AFB at 10:30 a.m. CDT and touched down on Barksdale's runway at 5:22 p.m. after making a brief refueling stop at Altus Air Force Base, Okla.

The departure of the aircraft was scheduled before 9:30 a.m. Saturday,

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# It's an honor to be a part of 8th Air Force

*Lt. Gen. Kevin Chilton*
Eighth Air Force Commander

I can't tell you how excited I am to be called to serve in Eighth Air Force. I've heard nothing but great things about the Mighty Eighth and its people, and I'm looking forward to the opportunity to lead this great organization.

My family and I are equally thrilled to become part of the Bossier City and Shreveport communities. We look forward to getting to know our new neighbors both on and off the base.

Eighth Air Force has seen a lot of changes over the past three years. A few of the milestones include opening the Strategic Air Forces Air & Space Operations Center, standing up the 608th Strategic Operations Squadron, activating 8th Air Force Detachment 1 and reopening the 8th Air Force Headquarters building after the devastating fire. Not to mention the successful execution of Joint Expeditionary Force Experiment '04, Blue Flag '05, and the many exercises that proved your resolve.

Through innovation you've taken this command to the leading edge of modern warfighting. You've made valuable contributions in the Global War on Terrorism and added to the proud heritage of Eighth Air Force.

However, there is still much work to do. Many members of the Mighty Eighth team are still deployed to southwest Asia in support of the Global War on Terrorism. We look forward to their safe return. In addition, the Eighth Air Force team is already gearing up to lead Joint Expeditionary Force Experiment '06, and is set to participate in a number of upcoming U.S. Strategic Command exercises. We also lead the way in the information battlespace.

Our command is leading America's Information Operations experts who train to disrupt enemy communications and information systems in concert with aerospace power physically destroying enemy defenses and the will to fight. This is a mission that will certainly continue to grow and evolve.

Courtesy photo

**Lt. Gen. Kevin Chilton poses with his family after his change of command.**

As we look to the future together, Eighth Air Force will remain committed to three things: victory today, change for sustained dominance and readiness at all times. We are engaged today, we will continue to change as we have done throughout our history to maintain our dominance and we will be ready for tomorrow.

I look forward to working with the outstanding enlisted, officer and civilian professionals who make up the Eighth Air Force team as we take on these challenges. I have full confidence that each and every one of you will join me in doing your duty while living our Air Force core values of integrity, service before self and excellence in all we do, every day that we have the privilege to serve the United States of America

Again, it is truly an honor to be at Barksdale, and to serve with all of you, and become part of the rich heritage of professional service to our country that belongs to the "Mighty Eighth." Cathy and I look forward to meeting all of you soon.

## The "Mighty Eighth" Voice

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**Eighth Air Force Commander**
Lt. Gen. Kevin Chilton

**Chief, Public Affairs**
Capt. Carla Pampe
carla.pampe@barksdale.af.mil

**Editor**
Tech. Sgt. Jeff Loftin
NCOIC, Public Affairs
jeffery.loftin@barksdale.af.mil

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but was delayed until 6:20 a.m. Sunday morning due to poor weather conditions. Extreme caution was taken because rain can damage the shuttle's thermal tiles and blankets.

Lt. Gen. Kevin Chilton, 8th Air Force commander and former astronaut, said he was pleased the shuttle was stopping at Barksdale on its way home.

"I don't care whether it's planned or whatever, I'm just so happy that Discovery is stopping here," General Chilton said. "I see it as a salute to the 2d Bomb Wing and all the people who helped the Columbia and I know NASA would probably feel the same way."

Col. Michael Shoults, 2d BW vice commander, said it was great to help support NASA and the space shuttle program as it gets back on track.

"There seemed to be a common theme out there; this was like a healing process for the community and the base," Colonel Shoults said. "Everyone did a tremendous job getting the NASA crew everything they needed. We were told we were a possible support location, and when we found out for sure earlier that morning, all the groups energized their support plans. It was a total team effort."

The colonel added that he's seen the shuttle ferried back to Florida once before while stationed at Dyess Air Force Base, Texas.

"It's always amazing to see the (Boeing) 747 with the shuttle on the back of it," he said. "I was thinking that only a week ago this thing was orbiting the earth and now here it is, on Barksdale."

Photo by Tech. Sgt. Robert Horstman

**Space Shuttle Discovery Transportation System-114 lands at Barksdale Air Force Base, La., during its ferry flight from Edwards Air Force Base, Calif., to Kennedy Space Center, Fla. It was the first time since the Columbia tragedy that a shuttle made a stop at Barksdale.**

Photo by Master Sgt. Michael Kaplan

**Barksdale members assist NASA with an inspection of the orbital maneuvering rocket engines on the nose of Discovery.**

In addition to everyone awaiting the arrival of the shuttle on the flightline, many people waited just off base with the hopes of catching a glimpse. People were able to see the shuttle as it made its approach over Bossier City, La., and from the softball fields at the north end of the runway. Military members and their families also lined the fence to the flightline to look at the shuttle as it sat on the waited to leave for more than 36 hours.

Airman 1st Class Brent Beddow, a fitness specialist from the 2d Services Squadron, was one of the onlookers. Airman Beddow said he's seen a space shuttle twice before; once as it took off and again when he toured a static display of one.

"Seeing it at Barksdale is much different from when it takes off," he said. "I was 30 miles away when it took off so it was very different to see it close up. It was also different seeing it after recently returning from space instead of cleaned up.

"When I looked at it I really wished I could have been aboard the shuttle during the flight because after it returned you look back and know where it has been," Airman Beddow added.

Discovery landed at the Kennedy Space Center Sunday and is tentatively scheduled for another mission in March 2006.

# 54 HF supports Joint Task Force Katrina

*By Maj. Dani Johnson*
Minot Air Force Base Public Affairs

Photos by Staff Sgt. Joe Laws

**Capt. David Fink adjusts his helmet strap in a UH-1N "Huey" helicopter in preparation for takeoff here Sept. 2. Captain Fink, Maj. Brian McGraw (background), and two others departed for Columbus Air Force Base, Miss., to assist in the Hurricane Katrina disaster relief efforts. The base, thus far, has sent 13 people and one helicopter from the 54th Helicopter Flight to aid the recovery.**

**MINOT AIR FORCE BASE, N.D. —** Four 54th Helicopter Flight Airmen and one UH-1N "Huey" helicopter departed early Sept. 2 en route to Columbus Air Force Base, Miss., to assist in the Hurricane Katrina disaster response.

The crew, comprised of two pilots, a flight engineer and a contract maintenance crew chief, along with two additional crews and contract maintenance who will depart throughout the weekend, will stage from the Mississippi base and aid the efforts throughout the southeastern region.

"We are pleased to support the disaster response efforts in the southeast," said Col. Dan Ceichanowski, 91st Operations Group commander. "Our crews are trained to conduct the missions required and are very happy to be able to help those in need during this dire humanitarian crisis."

The crews are trained in search and rescue and as well as transporting people and supplies to areas where ground travel isn't available. Specific mission requirements will be determined once the crews are in place.

"I'm excited but also there is a sadness to why we are going down there," said Capt. David Fink, 54th HF pilot. "I hope we can help out as much as we can. It's great to be able to do the job we are trained to do – help people."

The crew chiefs going with the helicopters are contracted by Doss Aviation and are all primarily prior military helicopter mechanics.

"This is fun for my guys. We are all pumped up," said David Licht, Doss Aviation site manager. "The crew chiefs will provide maintenance very similar to how they do here but under field conditions."

Air Force Space Command and 20th Air Force deployed the 54th HF along with five helicopters and approximately 55 people from F.E. Warren Air Force Base, Wyo., Malmstrom AFB, Mont., and Vandenberg AFB, Calif.

"We extend our condolences to the victims of Hurricane Katrina," said Maj. Gen. Frank Klotz, 20th AF commander. "Our thoughts and prayers are with all the citizens of the affected towns and counties, and to their families during these difficult and trying times.

"We are sending the six helicopters in order to sustain 24/7 operations," the general added.

At this time, there is no defined time limit on how long the crews will stay in the south.

The last time the 54th HF was called upon for humanitarian support was the 1997 floods in Grand Forks, N.D.

# 917th Wing A-10s perform 'live'

*By Staff Sgt. Ebony Nichols*
917th Wing Public Affairs

Photos by Staff Sgt. Ebony Nichols

**Tech. Sgt. Wray Williams, 917th Maintenance Squadron munitions systems mechanic, installs an FMU-139 electronic fuse in the tail end of an MK-82, 500-pound general purpose bomb during Patriot Lightning in McChord AFB, Wash., Aug. 6-14. Below, Maj. Michael Bachtell, 47th Fighter Squadron instructor pilot, pre-flights an A-10.**

It seems like deja vu for most who attend. Load 'em up, start the engines, pilots take seats, planes fly and bombs drop. This year, however, was different ... they went "live."

Pilots, maintainers and support personnel deployed to McChord AFB, Wash., Aug. 6-14, for close air support training with forward air controllers from local Army Guard units. These "guys on the ground" gained training on how to control air strikes in Afghanistan.

Due to their unique location at McChord, pilots were able to drop live munitions, training they don't get on a daily basis here at home, according to Lt. Col. Greg Eckfeld, 47th Fighter Squadron commander.

"This training provides Airmen from logistics, supply, maintenance and other squadrons the ability to accomplish vital missions with operations and to put firepower on targets," said Lt. Col. Jim Marks Jr., project manager for Patriot Lightning.

Members of the munitions shop used machines to assist in making bombs, something they don't do back at Barksdale, where they build them right on the trailers, said Master Sgt. Philip Weber, 917th Maintenance Squadron materials supervisor.

The munitions members built their bombs in a secluded area set apart from the flight line and the rest of the base. "The isolated area gave the guys a feel for the type of area they would be working in foreign operations," said Chief Master Sgt. Robert Murray, 717th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron maintenance superintendent.

Patriot Lightning was also successful in benefiting members in supervisory positions.

This TDY was an opportunity for supervisors to "learn new faces and personalities," according to Chief Murray.

Airmen in all areas of the deployment participated in a bit more teamwork than they were used to. "We got to work with different flights here," said Tech. Sgt. Wiley Jackson, 717 AMXS Orderly Room noncommissioned officer in charge. "There are less people here (than we are responsible for at home).

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# Resnicoff speech highlights wingman day activities

*By Tech. Sgt. Jeff Loftin*
Eighth Air Force Public Affairs

**BARKSDALE AIR FORCE BASE, La.** – After helping the Air Force review its values-based policies, Rabbi Arnold Resnicoff spoke to Headquarters Eighth Air Force members at their annual wingman day Aug. 31.

The speech by the special assistant to the Air Force secretary and chief of staff for values and vision was the highlight of nearly a week of activities here stressing teamwork and camaraderie.

"He spoke about how values and spirituality kind of blend into the wingman concept," said Capt. Allen Boettcher, who headed up the event. "He was recommended as a guest speaker to General (Bruce) Carlson (former 8th Air Force commander) at Corona as a very energetic speaker. We thought the message would probably fall in line with our wingman day, and it really did. I don't think we could have hit it any better."

"The speaker's message was both timely and pertinent," said Master Sgt. Dennis Graham, superintendent of Headquarters 8th Air Force Education and Training. "Our guest speaker, Rabbi Resnicoff, stressed the value of life itself and our role in preserving it. He also talked about ethical decisions we face and explained the difference between being loyal and maintaining personal integrity. Finally, he clarified the intent of the new religious guidelines which do not prohibit our freedom to express our faith, but the guidelines do seek to prevent someone from misusing their position to force their faith on others. The guidelines also seek to prevent the belittling of those who do not share your views."

The speech was taped and parts of it will be used in 2d Bomb Wing's upcoming wingman day.

Photo by Capt. Allen Boettcher

**Volunteers clear a overgrown brush from a bridge on a trail on Barksdale Air Force Base, La., as one of the activities of wingman day. Other events included a speech from Rabbi Arnold Resnicoff, special assistant to the Air Force secretary and chief of staff for values and vision, cleaning a portion of a local highway, and a volksmarch along the cleared trail.**

Although the speech was the highlight of the week, it was only one of many activities designed to improve wingmanship.

"Our theme basically was "slow down." There was a survey put out during our safety day back in May," said Captain Boettcher. "They found that a lot of our airmen and people 18-26 were in a hurry. Everything they did was in a hurry. They would create risky behavior by being in a hurry. So we at 8th Air Force adopted the theme of slow down, take time out, think about the risks of what you're doing. This was to not only to prevent suicides but also to prevent unnecessary injuries also."

Activities included clearing a walking trail on Barksdale's East Reservation, cleaning a section of a highway near the base, and a volksmarch on the cleared trail.

"Wing man day falls into three categories: mental, physical and spiritual," said Captain Boettcher. "Spiritual is not just religious but helping others and the community. So, for our spiritual concept we did a couple of community projects."

The volksmarch and the speech filled the other concepts of wingman day. There were plenty of volunteers for the cleanups, according to Captain Boettcher, and approximately 150 people participated in the volksmarch.

"I believe the recent Wingman day was worthwhile," said Sergeant Graham, "because we addressed some very important issues confronting the entire Air Force."

# 8 AF IMA puts on second star

*By Tech. Sgt. Jeff Loftin*
Eighth Air Force Public Affairs

**BARKSDALE AIR FORCE BASE, La.** – As the new commander of Eighth Air Force, Lt. Gen. Kevin Chilton had the rare privilege of presenting a new star to his mobilization assistant.

Brig. Gen. John H. Bordelon Jr. was promoted to major general in a ceremony here Sept. 9.

"When I was first nominated to come down here and take this job," said General Chilton, "the previous commander, General (Bruce) Carlson, said 'man you're going to have an awful lot on your plate down here, but let me tell you one thing you're not going to have to worry about and that's the AOC and all the things associated with it because you have working for you the smartest and best guy in the United States Air Force and the best instructor in the Air Force, one General John Bordelon.

"When I heard that he was getting promoted to two star I got a little nervous," said General Chilton. "Usually when you get promoted you've got to move. That was the first thing I asked General Carlson, 'is John leaving if we get him promoted because if he is I'm not going to have this ceremony.' He said no, the good news is he's going to stay. That's good news for his family. That's good news for Louisiana and that's good news for us at the Mighty Eighth."

About 60 people attended the ceremony; some from as far away as Houston, Texas. Upon receiving his new rank General Bordelon thanked the entire 8th Air Force team.

"I want to thank the people who are really responsible for this promotion – not only the 917th, but the people of the 8th Air Force and the 2d Bomb Wing," he said. "These are the people, the people that actually do the work and are responsible for me standing here and being promoted today."

General Bordelon then told the audience about how his father's military footlocker had impacted his life. The trunk, which contained his father's military belongings, fascinated him.

"I didn't know it at the time, but I figured it out later. In there was a green uniform from the Army Air Corps," said General Bordelon. "My father actually made the transition here at Barksdale from the Army Air Corps in 1947 to the Air Force."

The general also told how that family tradition of military service continues with his son. The general told how he presided over the commissioning ceremony of his son as a lieutenant in the Army National Guard, then a week later his son was deployed to New Orleans to help with hurricane relief.

Photo by Senior Airman Stephen Otero

**Lt. Gen. Kevin Chilton, Eighth Air Force commander, hands Maj. Gen. John H. Bordelon, 8th Air Force mobilization assistant, his two-star flag at his promotion ceremony.**

The general has also had a long career of service. General Bordelon began his career flying the F-4 Phantom on active duty. After several assignments he was selected to become a fighter weapons instructor, passing one of the toughest schools in the Air Force for the exclusive job. After two years he joined the Air Force Reserve and held several positions in the 917th Fighter Wing here including pilot, instructor pilot, flight commander and squadron commander. He then served as the vice commander of the 926th Fighter Wing at Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base, New Orleans, La.

Prior to his current assignment he served as mobilization assistant to the commander of Air Force Command and Control and Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance Center – a field operating agency of Headquarters Air Force.

"John has been a warrior out front," said General Chilton. "He's done it in the airplane. He's done it at the senior levels of our Air Force. He's been part of Operation Southern Watch, Operation Enduring Freedom, and Operation Horn of Africa. He's lead some of the most critical experiments we do in the Air Force in the joint world for command and control. I just can't say how much I appreciate having him on the team."

# Sister in Arms: Airman follows brothers' footsteps

*By Senior Airman Joe Lacdan*
509th Bomb Wing Public Affairs

**WHITEMAN AIR FORCE BASE, Mo. —** Gina Weaver is not a war hero like her three Soldier brothers.

The 21-year-old senior airman doesn't define herself with medals or battle scars.

But like her three older brothers, she shares a love of family, the outdoors and of country.

While growing up in a military family in central Florida and southern Alabama she'd heard their stories.

Her older brothers, Steve and Aaron, were proud Army Rangers and helicopter pilots, and her brother Ryan was an intelligence analyst and pilot. She said they always seemed to be off in places few Americans but those in uniform dare to tread: Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq. Her father, Mike, served in the Marine Corps, and her grandfather, E. Wayne, fought the Japanese in the West Pacific during World War II.

One of seven girls in the Weaver family, she became the only one to join her brothers in service. She too grew up a proud American, but she wanted to do something more. So following graduation from Citrus High School in Inverness, Fla. in 2002, she enlisted in the Air Force.

"She didn't go in to see what the Air Force could do for her," said her brother, Ryan, a 32-year-old Army warrant officer stationed at Fort Rucker, Ala. "She went in for the right reasons ... to serve her country."

She became a military policeman assigned to Whiteman's security forces squadron. The arduous task of augmenting perimeter security in the weapons storage area was her first taste of the military. This stressful duty didn't faze Airman Weaver.

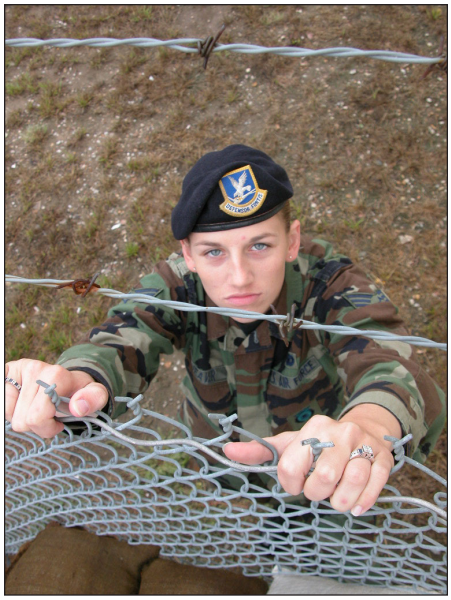

Photo by **Senior Airman Joe Lacdan**

**Senior Airman Gina Weaver, 509th Security Forces Squadron, comes from a line of U.S. service members. Her brother, Aaron, an Army warrant officer, was killed in Iraq in January 2004. Her father, Mike, served in the Marine Corps and her grandfather, E. Wayne, was a bell-gunner in the Army-Air Corps during World War II.**

"I don't think Gina feels she needs to prove anything to anybody," Ryan Weaver said. "She stands on her own."

### Fallen Soldier

Aaron Weaver was 12 years old when his half-sister, Gina, was born.

While his baby sister learned to take her first steps, Aaron pounded pavement on the school track, kicked soccer balls and dreamed of joining the Army.

Aaron was the lucky one in the Weaver clan. He earned his chance to serve in the Army's elite, joining the Ranger ranks in 1991.

In 1993, he survived an ambush that killed 18 of his fellow Soldiers on the streets of Mogadishu, Somalia, infamously known as the Black Hawk Down incident. He was later interviewed for the film by the same name.

In 2002, doctors diagnosed him with testicular cancer, withering away his frame to 115 pounds. But he underwent three surgeries, signed a medical waiver and deployed for Iraq in late 2003. While deployed, he had to take regular blood checks in case the cancer returned.

"He didn't have to go to Iraq," Airman Weaver said. "But he wanted to be there for his brothers."

"That boy didn't know the word quit," Mike said of his son.

Then the unthinkable happened.

On Jan. 8, 2004, Aaron joined eight of his fellow Soldiers in a medical evacuation. His helicopter flew just south of Fallujah riding to Baghdad for his bi-monthly blood check. Suddenly, a surface-to-air-missile struck the chopper. Aaron and the other eight passengers were killed. He was 32.

"It was a shock," Airman Weaver said.

She returned to Inverness to help her family bury her brother. The funeral hit the Weaver family hard, but Airman Weaver did not shed many tears.

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# In the thick of the fight

*Capt. Carla Pampe*
Eighth Air Force Public Affairs

As our Armed Forces continue to fight the Global War on Terrorism, the Air Force continues to provide full spectrum support to the other services—from airlift, to close air support, to boots on the ground in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Two members of the 8th Information Warfare Flight at Barksdale are in the thick of the fight, as they are deployed in support of the Marine Multi-National Force – West, or MNF-W, Command Operations Center in Central Iraq. Tech. Sgts. Jason Graves and Carl Weaver are providing targeting and intelligence support to the Marine Expeditionary Force.

While they are deployed together, the two work in separate parts of the MEF Headquarters. "Jason is doing Information Operations (IO) targeting in support of Marine operations in their area of responsibility, and Carl is working support to current operations—basically feeding the Marines IO Intel," said Lt. Col. Matsushima, 8th IWF Commander.

According to Air Force Doctrine, Information Operations is the integrated employment of the core capabilities of influence operations, electronic warfare operations, and network warfare operations, in concert with specified integrated control enablers, to influence, disrupt, corrupt or usurp adversarial human and automated decision making while protecting our own.

Sergeant Weaver serves as the MNF-W Command Operations Center Information Operations Watch Officer.

"My duties include providing up-to-date information about ongoing operations to Fires and Effects Coordination Cell; Information Operations," he said in a recent e-mail interview. "In addition, I provide information to Current Effects for the Marine Expeditionary Force on operations throughout the Area of Operations."

The MEF Fire and Effects Coordination Cell plans, coordinates and executes information operations, air support, lethal and non-lethal effects in support of the MEF Commander's concept of operations.

Sergeant Weaver said the most rewarding part of his job is the chance to be in the middle of things.

"I'm usually one of the first ones to hear when something happens, and I'm able to watch the whole war happen all around me," he said. "It was very cool being the first Air Force enlisted guys assigned to this base, plus we get to support the Marine Corps— the guys that are going out and putting their lives at risk everyday. I'm pretty sure no one else from my career field can say that they were part of something like that."

Courtesy photo

**Tech. Sgts. Carl Weaver and Jason Graves, from the 8th Air Force Information Warfare Flight, deployed in support of the Marine Multi-National Force in Central Iraq.**

Sergeant Graves serves as the Special Technical Operations, or STO, non-commissioned officer in charge and as an IO planner.

"In a nutshell I conduct area of operations-wide strategic IO planning and provide tactical level IO Intel support," he said.

Among his duties, Sergeant Graves provides information operations planning and targeting support to the Fires and Effects Coordination Cell. He also supports influence objectives in the area of operations, develops and nominates targets to

● *See FIGHT, page 10*

● FIGHT, from page 9

support the MEF objectives, and coordinates, de-conflicts and integrates targeting issues between IO, Fire and Effects cell and STO.

"The most rewarding part of my job is the feeling of getting to finish what I started," Sergeant Graves said. "In 2001 I was involved in pre-planning efforts for Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) but I deployed to South Korea before operations came to fruition. I missed the on-set of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) which I watched from my in-laws couch while on leave after returning from South Korea.

"Despite all of the planning I have done stateside in support of OEF/OIF, I finally feel as though I have played a more significant roll in the War on Terrorism," he added.

Both sergeants feel that their deployment has increased their insight on the conflict, and their understanding of the Iraqi people.

"My impression of the Iraqi people is that they *want* us here, for the most part," Sergeant Weaver said. "They understand what we are trying to do, and that we are trying to help them, and they are grateful for that."

Sergeant Graves feels like the Iraqi people are torn between two cultures.

"They have known violence their entire lives and for the males it is engrained into their culture as a symbol of honor," he said. "I can see some want change; it is clear to me that many want peace; it is obvious to me they long for a ~~to~~ return to the days before Saddam and back to the days when Iraq was part of the cultural center of the world but I can see frustration, anger and resentment toward both sides of this conflict because these people are the ones caught in the middle.

Courtesy photo

**Tech. Sgt. Jason Graves poses with a local national while deployed to Iraq to support the Marines. In his duties there Sergeant Graves provides information operations planning and targeting support to the Fires and Effects Coordination Cell.**

I've seen children running to the street-side, like a parade was coming through, just to wave at the soldiers," he added. "I've [shaken] the hands of men who thank us with their smiles, offers of coffee and pats on the back but I've also seen the glares which are filled with rage, distrust and hate."

Sergeant Graves—whose father and grandfather were both combat Marines—also feels like the military's mission is to provide a future for the people of Iraq.

"The people in three-fourths of this country (the size of Texas) already go about their lives in relative peace and calm," he said. "We have helped reconstruct schools and hospitals. We are teaching them how to profit from and manage their nation's vast wealth and natural resources, and we are hoping they are learning tolerance for the many religions, tribes and cultures within their own boarders. Most of all, we are showing them that they, as free people, have a choice."

Sergeant Weaver agrees, and hopes that people around the world will understand that the mission in Iraq is moving forward.

"Everyone needs to know that we *are* making progress," he said. "Mostly everyone hears about the soldiers that are being wounded and killed, but what they don't normally see is the amount of weapons we are taking off the Iraqi streets, or the

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We are more closely knit here (at McChord)."

In all, Patriot Lightning was a great success. There were some challenges, as with any deployment. But they were overcome, thanks to everyone involved.

"The most challenging part of Patriot Lightning was coordinating logistics, facilities, range, air space, weapons and fuels," said Colonel Marks. "(I would like to pay) accolades to the staff and everyone deployed."

"Everyone gave 110 percent on their jobs, especially those working for and with me," he said. "They were the real muscle."

● SISTER, from page 8

"(Aaron's death) hit us all deeply," Ryan said. "Gina was a little bit more strong."

Instead of showing her emotions, she spent time consoling her late brother's family. He left behind a wife, a daughter and a son.

"The girls are as tough as the boys in this family," Mike Weaver said. "Gina was devastated. She is the most tenderhearted in the family, but she didn't show that."

**Next in family line**

Airman Weaver keeps a picture of her brothers Aaron and Ryan on her desk in the 509th SFS headquarters.

She said the photo keeps her going. With many SFS troops deployed worldwide, the troops on the homefront are heavily tasked.

As a physical security assistant, she helps maintain security devices on restricted areas and entry control points. During exercises, she must endure 18-hour work days, seven days a week. Her supervisor, Tech. Sgt. Shane Holtz, said he's never heard a complaint from Airman Weaver.

Airman Weaver said she makes a small sacrifice compared to that of her late brother.

"When things get rough, I think of what my brothers went through," Airman Weaver said. "They are the bravest people I know and I admire everything they've done throughout their careers. They're my heroes."

● FIGHT, from page 10

amount of insurgents and foreign fighters that we are killing or taking into custody.

"The people of Iraq are seeing the progress that we are making and are taking the opportunity to stand up for themselves," he added. "They are slowly allowing themselves to be less intimidated by the insurgents and are keeping them from doing anti-Iraqi/Coalition activities. The people back home need to realize that it is going to take time and effort from everyone over here and all over the world, but there is an end in sight."

While he understood the dangers of the mission in Iraq before deploying, Sergeant Weaver said he was initially surprised by the reality of everything.

"Our first night on station we were hit with a rocket attack that exploded less than 200 feet from where we were standing," he said. "We were close enough to feel the heat and concussion blast. Fortunately no one was hurt, but it was a definite wakeup call. We are in a war zone. Soldiers and Marines are getting hurt everyday, and we are here to make sure that stays to a minimum.

"I never felt that my job was as important as it is right now," Sergeant Weaver added. "It's the greatest, yet scariest, feeling ever, and I would volunteer to do it all over again in a heartbeat."

Sergeant Graves agreed, and said although he misses his family everyday, he feels what he is doing is important, and that he is making a difference in Iraq.

"Despite the heat, flies, sandstorms and monotony, I am enjoying my time here," he added. "Every night, as the sun sets, I take the time to relax and enjoy one of the many stogies sent from home. The stars are clear and bright, and on occasion I'll see a shooting star or a satellite pass over head; it has almost become a game trying to spot them. I enjoy spotting the wildlife that inhabits the base; I've seen several types of lizards, a hedgehog and various bird life."

Sergeant Graves added, "All in all; from my experience during operations, missions I've taken part in to the city of Fallujah and the everyday experiences of life here on base, this is a memory that will last a lifetime and only enhance my ability to do my job as an enlisted member of the Air Force."